

2026 VIRGINIA BEACH POLAR PLUNGE FESTIVAL WEEKEND

Crisis Communication Plan

I. Purpose and Goal

The Crisis Communication Plan provides Special Olympics Virginia (SOVA) standards for communication within the organization and between the organization, the media, and the public in the event of an emergency situation. The purpose of this plan is to give guidelines for communicating during an emergency that protects those involved as well as the organization. SOVA and the Polar Plunge have an excellent image in the community. It is the organization's intent to protect and preserve that image along with the integrity of the movement during any emergency or crisis situation.

This plan not only addresses media relations and communication issues but also includes procedures for the rapid identification of potentially harmful situations and methods for responding to these situations quickly and effectively.

It is the goal of this Crisis Communication Plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations and to ensure that SOVA staff and Polar Plunge volunteers are familiar with those procedures and their roles in the event of a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the organization.

II. Objectives of the Plan

The Polar Plunge Festival Crisis Communication Plan has four objectives.

1. To be organizationally prepared to deal with all crisis communication scenarios in an effective manner.
2. To gain and maintain news media confidence by providing on-going, timely, accurate information.
3. To remain concerned, compassionate and cooperative in all public communication.
4. To demonstrate that the Polar Plunge is a safe event.

III. Identifying a Crisis

A crisis is a significant disruption, which has the potential to stimulate extensive news media coverage and public scrutiny that interferes with the event's normal business activities. A crisis may have one or more of the following elements: occur suddenly; demands a quick response; interferes with the event's outcome; creates uncertainty and stress; threatens the reputation, assets and bottom line of the event; escalates in intensity; causes outsiders to scrutinize the event; and permanently alters the event.

A crisis may be, but is not limited to, any of the following:

- Any loss of life for any reason (including natural causes) of any athlete, coach, volunteer, event participant, spectator, staff member, or attendee.

- Any accident or injury posing potential loss of life.
- Any accident involving multiple people (bus accident, etc.)
- Any severe weather situation that may result in serious injury or property damage.
- Any large-scale disaster, whether by natural causes (e.g. hurricane) or other (e.g. terrorist activity).
- Any criminal action of an athlete, coach, volunteer, event participant or staff member.

At all times event staff should be mindful of situations that could escalate and address them with the appropriate Crisis Communication Team member.

IV. Crisis Communication Team(s)

The Polar Plunge's Crisis Communication Team is designed to: conduct research and perform verifications; receive media inquiry and coordinate response; assess organizational damage and ensure continued operations; interact with the affected agencies; prepare and release public communications; monitor existing media; and correct misinformation and rumor.

The current SOVA Crisis Communication Team includes:

President: David Thomason
 Vice President, Development & Communications: Holly Claytor
 Senior Director of Development: Katelynn Howell
 SOVA Staff Liaison: Mckenzie Dunford
 Virginia Beach EMS
 Virginia Beach Law Enforcement

The team and their responsibilities are as follows:

SOVA President

- Oversees Crisis Communication Team
- Serves as primary spokesperson to the media
- Serves as liaison to SOVA Board of Directors
- Serves as liaison to SOI
- Serves as liaison to SOVA attorney
- Serves as liaison to law enforcement agencies
- Activates American Specialty's Crisis Phone Center if necessary.

Vice President, Development & Communications

- Liaison to the media

- Serves as backup spokesperson to the media
- Approves and writes all media statements, with assistance from SOVA attorney and PR Director
- Assists President with prepared statement

Senior Director of Development

- Backup media liaison
- Prioritizes all message inquiries
- Assists with writing media statements
- Coordinates media coverage
- Distributes statements

Special Events Manager

- Event lead
- Assists as a liaison between city personal, law enforcement etc.
- Coordinate any Polar Plunge Crisis Team meetings should we need to convene.
 - Will communicate with other members of the Crisis team should the event experience any threat or weather occurrences.

The Crisis Communication Team should use these principles of management.

- Be proactive
- Be synergistic
- See the big picture
- Learn to delegate
- Be an effective listener
- Communicate
- Look for opportunity
- Be honest always
- Be fair and consistent

V. Crisis Plan

Below are six general procedures that would apply to all crisis communication.

Proactive Planning

In its normal event planning stages, SOVA staff will:

1. Designate a location with adequate space, phones, computers and Internet connection for the Crisis Management Team to meet if needed – **Hilton Oceanfront/Ferebee Room/Second Floor (in between Princess Anne and hallway to restrooms/elevators)**
2. Designate a location to hold news conferences/briefings in the case of an emergency. – **Hilton Oceanfront/Ferebee Room/Second Floor (in between Princess Anne and hallway to restrooms/elevators)**
3. Distribute the Crisis Communication Plan to the Crisis Communication Team prior to the event to clarify each member's responsibilities.
4. Distribute the crisis communication plan to all games/event management volunteers prior to the event. This plan will outline how to respond to an emergency, how to contact emergency personnel (fire, police and medical), where to locate medical assistance, and how to contact SOVA staff.

Assessment

Prompt and appropriate action can help minimize the impact of a crisis. Should you learn of or witness a crisis, follow these guidelines:

1. Identify the crisis and notify the proper authorities. If police, fire or medical is needed CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY. Take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of those involved and nearby if necessary (e.g. evacuate an area). If trained and necessary, and the crisis scene is safe to do so, provide CPR/first aid to the injured. Stay calm and flexible so that you may handle the unexpected needs of the crisis.
2. After calling 911, if needed, immediately notify Mckenzie Dunford (757-310-3027). Only provide information to emergency personnel and SOVA staff members on crisis management team.
3. Collect names and contact information for all those involved or witness to the crisis. Release this information only to the police and SOVA staff.

Assembling Crisis Communication Team

If necessary, the SOVA staff member in charge of the event will immediately contact a member of the Crisis Communication Team. The Crisis Communication Team member contacted will determine whether to activate the Crisis Communication Team. The Crisis Communication Team handles the gathering and distributing of information regarding the crisis or emergency situation.

Response

The Crisis Communication Team, after assessing the nature and scope of the situation, should:

1. Call together any additional personnel needed to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Determine and prioritize the audiences that the crisis may affect.
3. Determine the best methods for communicating with the affected audiences (media, phone, fax, email, Internet, hotline, etc.).
4. Determine what resources and personnel will be needed to carry out responses to the media and audience inquiries. (For example: computers, phones, fax machines, staff members, key volunteers, etc.).
5. Confirm spokesperson.

6. Draft a fact sheet. The fact sheet should contain a summary statement of the situation including all known confirmed details to be released to the media. This information should be made available to (and approved by) the President. The fact sheet should be analyzed with respect to the public's right to know and concerns for privacy and security in consultation with SOVA's attorney. If an injury or death has occurred, do not release the name(s) of the injured/deceased until all of the next of kin (defined as an immediate family) have been notified.
7. Volunteers should refer all inquiries by the media to SOVA staff.
8. Notify key constituencies with the same message. Determine key constituencies that should be informed of the crisis. It is important to keep key people informed as effective communication will help quash rumors, maintain morale and ensure continued orderly operations of the organization. Among the groups that should be considered for communication in a crisis situation are:
 - a. Staff
 - b. Board of Directors
 - c. SOI
 - d. Sponsors and donors
 - e. Law enforcement agencies
 - f. Volunteers
 - g. SOVA
 - h. General public
 - i. Mass media
 - j. Community leaders
9. Assign members of the crisis communication team to communicate the facts of the situation (contained in the fact sheet) and the organization's intended response to the above audiences except media.
10. Determine strategy of internal communications to be used if the crisis affects staff and key volunteers.
11. Man phones and set up information lines.

Missing Person Procedure

1 HOUR

- Person should notify SOVA staff members or volunteers present at the event who will then notify the Manager of Special Events. Make sure to record the person's name, place and time the person was last seen.
- If a Special Olympics VA athlete is missing at the hotel overnight or at the event, area volunteers or a parent/Guardian should notify their Area Coordinator if there is one present or a parent/guardian. If someone is not present to represent the athlete, 911 should be contacted.
- Search the area where the athlete or event attendee was last seen.
- Report back to Staff Members helping with the search.

1-2 hours

- Only the President or Vice President of SOVA will notify the police.
- Utilize the communication system to announce the person's name, sex, and a description of his/her appearance (all important information that would enable people to recognize the person).

- The SOVA Crisis Management Team will be assembled and briefed at the location of the incident.
- SOVA staff will work with the Event Management staff, Event Security, Medical personnel, and the local police department to help coordinate a search of the venue.
- Depending on the venue, SOVA handheld radios will be brought to a central distribution point for search volunteers to use. A sheet will be available to record radio serial numbers. Search locations will be assigned and the search will continue with set time frames to report in to the central security command center.
- **2 + HOURS - Police will give instructions**

Severe Weather Situation

- The Manager of Special Events will receive information through the National Weather Service and local sources (City personal and on-site weather tracking vehicle) on incoming weather issues.
- The Manager of Special Events will inform the Crisis Communication Team if weather interferes with or presents a safety issue with the scheduled and normal course of the event
- The Event Director will notify the DJ/host of the event that the event has been suspended temporarily and ask all guests to calmly evacuate the tent and return to the Hilton Hotel, their vehicle, or their hotel room until further notice.
- SOVA staff and VBSO will assist in clearing everyone out of the tent.
- A fact sheet will be drawn up summarizing all known facts regarding the situation. The summary sheet will be drafted by the Communications Crisis Team
- The Communications Crisis Team will summarize the plan for the remainder of the event.
- The Communications system and Text and Email Alert system will be utilized to update participants on delays and any cancelations of the event.

Special Olympics Virginia Lightning Policy

- Lightning has consistently been 1 of the top 3 causes of weather-related deaths in the United States. In order to protect the welfare of the athletes, volunteers, event staff, and attendees it is imperative that each venue take proper safety measures to best avoid a lightning-related accident. The Manager of Special Events along with on-site emergency personal will be directly in charge of the stoppage and continuation of the event.
- Suspension of an outdoor event: Special Olympics Virginia bases the suspension and resumption of the event based on the flash-to-bang method. The method is based on the fact that light travels faster than sound. To use the flash-to-bang method, begin counting on the lightning flash, and stop counting when the associated clap of thunder is heard. When the flash-to-bang ratio is 30 seconds or less (lightning is within 6 miles), SOVA should do the following:
- Suspension of the event: A flash-to-bang count of 30 Seconds or less requires outdoor activities and indoor or outdoor pool activities to be suspended.
- To suspend the event, the Crisis Communications team should let the DJ or event host know to make the announcement. The Text/Email Alert system can be utilized to notify all participants of the current status of the event.

- Resumption of event: Once the event is suspended, the Crisis Communications team should not resume the event until 30 minutes after the last lightning flash is seen.
- All participants and volunteers should be instructed to seek a safe structure or location once the event is suspended. In the event that no safe indoor structure is within walking distance, volunteers and participants should seek shelter in their vehicles.

Releasing Information

In the case of an emergency situation only the Crisis Communication Team members are authorized to speak on behalf of SOVA to the media. In most instances, the designated spokesperson will release the information. All media inquiries should be referred to a member of the Crisis Communication Team.

Aftermath

Following any crisis, appropriate action must be taken to ensure that members of the SOVA community, and others as necessary, receive needed information and assistance to help bring closure to the crisis as well as relief from the effects of the event. Attention also should be placed on identifying and implementing measures to improve the action plan used during the crisis.

ACTIVE THREAT

Respond to an Active Threat or Active Shooter with these options:



RUN - HIDE - FIGHT

HOW TO RESPOND

WHEN AN ACTIVE SHOOTER IS IN YOUR VICINITY

1. RUN

- Have an escape route and plan in mind
- Leave your belongings behind
- Keep your hands visible

2. HIDE

- Hide in an area out of the shooter's view
- Block entry to your hiding place and lock the doors
- Silence your cell phone and/or pager

3. FIGHT

- As a last resort and only when your life is in imminent danger
- Attempt to incapacitate the shooter
- Act with physical aggression and throw items at the active shooter

CALL 911 WHEN IT IS SAFE TO DO SO

HOW TO RESPOND

WHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT ARRIVES

- Remain calm and follow instructions
- Put down any items in your hands (i.e., bags, jackets)
- Raise hands and spread fingers
- Keep hands visible at all times
- Avoid quick movements toward officers such as holding on to them for safety
- Avoid pointing, screaming or yelling
- Do not stop to ask officers for help or direction when evacuating

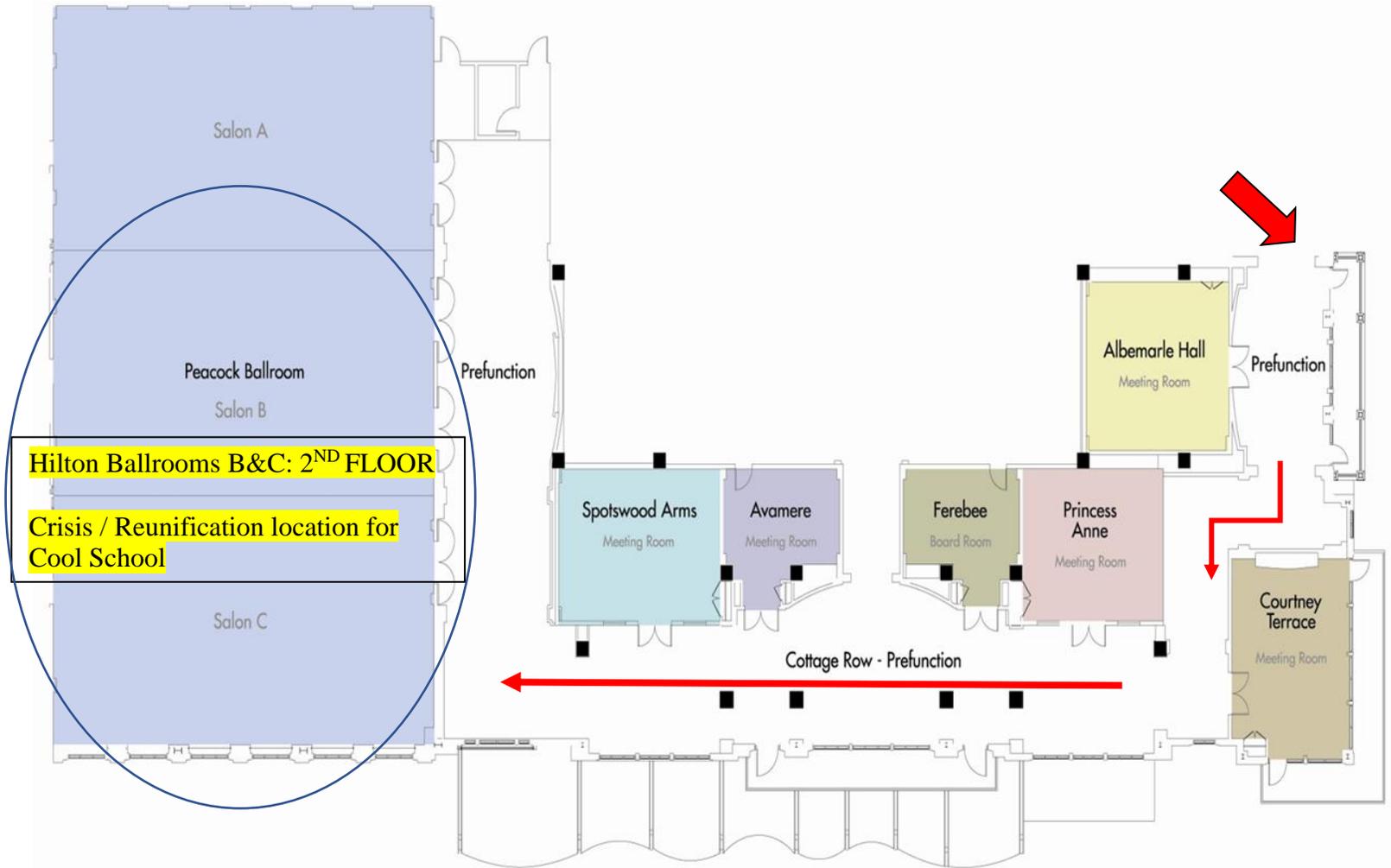
INFORMATION

YOU SHOULD PROVIDE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OR 911 OPERATOR

- Location of the active shooter
- Number of shooters
- Physical description of shooters
- Number and type of weapons held by shooters
- Number of potential victims at the location

COOL SCHOOL CHALLENGE

In the event of a crisis at the Cool School Challenge, we will follow the Crisis Communication Plan detailed for Polar Plunge above. If a reunification of teachers/students should need to happen, the Hilton Oceanfront Ballrooms (B&C) on the second floor will be used as a home base. Each school/teacher will have their own procedures to follow as well. SOVA provides each school with a team list on event day to be used as an attendance sheet which can also be utilized after a crisis to ensure everyone is accounted for. Teachers of each accompanied school should inform their students that the Hilton 2nd floor Ballrooms B&C should be where they resort to if any crisis occurs and the beach need to be evacuated. All teachers should notify students where the Hilton is located before event day. Volunteers and SOVA staff will be asked to help assist in any crisis situation with the assistance of local law enforcement.



 Steps to the 2nd floor are located in the lobby immediately next to the entrance to the Hilton by the park. Once on the 2nd floor, pass Albemarle Hall down the hallway to the end where Ballrooms B/C are located. See above