

Subject:

Imposed scenarios - crisis communications

Objectives for the participants, organized into working groups:

Read the topic, step by step, taking time to reflect as a group on each one, so as to:

- identify the right moment(s) for your engagement with the media,
- choose the proper tools and channels through which journalists will be informed,
- establish your message,
- prioritize your remarks,
- list items selected to remain unsaid,
- determine the venue of communication and any potentially associated institutional partners.
- write a press release read by a volunteer in a plenary session
- Prepare a filmed press conference given by a volunteer in a plenary session

1st scenario:

8:30 am: a police car has just hit a child.

8:50 am: The accident occurred near the elementary school.

The police say they were on their way to respond to a call, and all of the vehicle's safety signals and sirens were in operation.

Emergency services are on site. The child is very seriously injured.

The two policemen are in shock but are uninjured, except for a few bruises suffered by the officer on the passenger side.

9:00 am: The police say they were on their way to respond to a call in this so-called "sensitive" area and all of the vehicle's safety signals and sirens were in operation.

All the parents there for the start of school knew the child.

They are gathered in a crowd.

They say that Adel was 7 or 8 years old. Two of his brothers apparently go to the same school.

Their parents do not seem to be present, and in any case have not made any statement.

The police say that they lost control of their vehicle while turning.

9:30 am: The first news agency is dispatched to the scene. Factual report.

9:40 am: Arrival of the child's mother and family. She confirms her identity. Adel leaves with the emergency services.

The crowd rebukes the police.

9:45 am: A press release from a police union is reported in looped broadcasts on the 24-hour news channels: "the police vehicle was responding to a call and the police were in compliance with all siren and safety rules. The union expresses its condolences to the child's family" and "is investigating the safety rules established for operations in the vicinity of schools at the time when school is starting."

Reported by the news agency.

10:15: The police vehicle's speed was quite high. 80km/h in town.

11 am: The child's condition is life threatening.

It turns out that the police were about to finish up their night shift. Preliminary evidence shows that a going-away party had been held the previous evening at the police station. Blood alcohol testing is underway.

2nd scenario:

7 pm: Mr. and Mrs. Europe come to the police station.

Their child left school at 4 pm and has not returned home since.

At first they thought 8-year-old Tom had gone to visit Julian, a friend who lives along the route between the school and the bus stop. This often happens, because sometimes they have to work until 6 pm and he doesn't like being alone. But that night, Mrs. Europe was at home.

At 5:30, they called Julien's parents to check with them. But nobody had seen him.

They then drove through the neighbourhood around the school, and walked around the neighbourhood around the house, but were unsuccessful. His friends said that he had indeed left at 4 pm.

9:00 am the next day: Sam, one of Tom's friends, tells their teacher that he walked a bit of the way with him before leaving him at the bus stop in the company of a man who was asking for directions. There was a lady with him.

Sam then got on the bus.

9:30 am: The child confirms his account in an interview with units specializing in police examinations of children, and mentions a black car, which was definitely a Mercedes.

10 am: The gendarmes are alerted. Shots have been fired on Rose street.

10:15 am: At the scene, the police discover twenty angry people gathered in front of no. 10 Rose st., some of whom are armed. They are screaming "paedophile, we're gonna get you." The gendarmes call for reinforcements.

10:30 am: The crowd has become silent but remains in place. The police enter the residence.

11 am: The man claims to be a teacher in a neighbouring town and is not at work today because he is on a part-time work schedule for medical recovery.

Yesterday, from 4 pm to 6 pm, he had been at a teachers' meeting. Any of the teaching staff at the school will confirm his assertion.

He asks for protection, and says he wants to make a deposition, or file a complaint against the people gathered in front of his home. He asks the police to reveal their identities.

He admits that he has fallen under suspicion in the past: a minor, who was a student at a school where he used to teach - in another department of France - retracted her testimony. She was in love with him, but he had refused his advances. She had given the testimony for revenge, and had confirmed this in her letter to the prosecutor.

He has already moved once and doesn't want to run away anymore. He just wants to live a peaceful life now.

3rd scenario:

5 pm: An emergency call comes in to the gendarmes. The telephone conversation is cut off very quickly with a scream. It was a woman, calling on her mobile phone, saying that she was being held against her will in her home. She had the time to indicate that she lived at 14 General street.

5:10 pm: The phone call has been pinpointed. The gendarmes head out to the scene.

17h15: On site. No building superintendent present. It's on the second floor.

At first, no one answers the door, but then screams are heard. A man shouts: "If you come in, I'll blow this whole place up."

5:45 pm: The young woman has been identified. Penelope is 30 years old, works in a shop, and has 2 children. The student babysitter was bringing one of them home and was intercepted by the police. She is certain that the couple's other child, Jane, 18 months of age, is in the home, because that was why Penelope had asked her to go pick up 5-year-old Tom. She says that divorce proceedings are underway, that the young woman had just left her husband, and that the separation has been going very badly.

5 pm: It is impossible to make contact. The man refuses any dialogue. He shouts: "Get out of here, this is between me and her!"

6:15 pm: The police group specializing in these kinds of operations arrives.

Paul has a criminal record. He has had already been convicted twice for the same offence: domestic violence against his wife, Isabelle. The second time he was sentenced to 1 year without parole. The first had been a six-month suspended sentence. Both convictions included mandatory rehab. He was released before the end of his sentence, subject to compliance with his obligations.

7 pm: Upon investigation, two days prior he had failed to comply with one of his legal obligations, and failed to appear for his appointment with the supervising magistrate.

7:40 pm: A gunshot rings out. At the same time, a woman's scream is heard. The specialized police unit has not been able to establish contact with the deranged person.

7:45 pm: The man answers the phone. He wants his son. He asks for him to be sent up to him immediately. He says that otherwise he will kill his wife.

8 pm: A second gunshot.

8:10 pm: The police move in. The man and his wife are dead. The child is uninjured.

4th scenario:

10:30 am, August 25: a man has been shot at close range in his garden. 2 bullets in the neck.

August 26: the man was unknown to the police; the door-to-door enquiry produces no more than his identity and the story of a man living alone, a childless plumber. The weapon was a handgun.

September 10, 10:30 am: an anonymous letter made out of letters cut from a newspaper is sent to the police station. "The mosque will be built or white people will continue to die. You have 15 days"

September 11: a study of the letter produces nothing conclusive.

September 25th 10:30 am: a man is shot at close range in the street. 2 bullets in the neck.

September 26: the man was unknown to the police; the door-to-door enquiry produces no more than his identity and the story of a businessman with 4 children. The bullets came from the same gun.

October 10, 10:30 am: an anonymous letter made out of letters cut from a newspaper is sent to the police station. "The mosque will be built or white people will continue to die. You have 10 days"

October 11: a study of the letter produces nothing conclusive.

October 20, 10:30 am: a woman is shot at close range in the stairwell of her building. 2 bullets in the neck.

October 21: the woman was unknown to the police; the door-to-door enquiry produces no more than her identity and the story of a woman living alone, a childless baker. The bullets came from the same gun.

November 10, 10:30 am: an anonymous letter made out of letters cut from a newspaper is sent to the police station. "The mosque will be built or white people will continue to die. You have 5 days"

November 11: a study of the letter is in progress.

November 12: a fingerprint is found.

November 13: the fingerprint analysis indicates a suspect known to the police, who was in prison for 2 years for robbery. The man is not known to belong to any terrorist networks, or for committing acts of this kind.

The man is arrested.

5th scenario:

7 pm: The firemen, responding to a call in a housing estate, are forced to turn back after burning garbage is thrown at them several times.
A firefighter sustains head injuries.

7:20 pm: The police arrive at the scene. 5 night-shift teams are dispatched to the scene.

8 pm: A primary school is set on fire. Several storefront windows are destroyed by volleys of stones. 3 bus stop shelters are destroyed.
Young people from the estate charge at the police with whatever they can get their hands on: stones, Molotov cocktails, and other objects.

8:30 pm: 2 state security brigades arrive as reinforcements. The police are complaining that on top of everything else they have to protect members of the media as well.

8:45 pm: The first arrests are made. 7 people are arrested. 3 are minors.

9 pm: The Prefect makes an announcement regarding the forces that have been deployed. The minister of the interior is quoted in the press: "Any attacks on the forces of order responsible for the security of citizens is unacceptable and must be punished."

10 pm: The estate is still on fire. The number of young people in the streets is increasing. Young people from the neighbouring estates seem to have joined in as well.
The security forces charge and manage to disperse the young people.
Meanwhile, 26 new arrests are made.

The next day in the media:

The Prefect makes an announcement regarding the deployment of police forces overnight, reports the damage and indicates the number of arrests made. He mentions that most of the arrestees have criminal records.

The police unions denounce the lack of resources, the lack of police officers, and the laxity of the judiciary.

In a joint statement, the unions lament the difficult and ineffective work being done in the housing estates: they continue to arrest individuals who are then routinely released by the judges, or are sentenced to such minor penalties that as soon as they are back they can easily scoff at the police, who nevertheless have a responsibility to protect the citizens.

6th scenario:

Saturday night: Two bodies are found in a house. They are a man and a woman.

Preliminary evidence: The case is obviously one of murder (the woman) followed by suicide (the man).

8 days later: The facts are established. Criminal proceedings are terminated.

Day 9: The prosecutor receives a letter: the man's previous partner writes that she had filed several complaints for domestic violence, false imprisonment, etc. She implicates the former prosecutor, who refrained from prosecuting any of them.

Day 10: The young woman gives an interview to a local news outlet, which is reported at noon on the national news, and then by all the media.

Her remarks are consistent. She adds, however, that the man was a security guard and was very friendly with many policemen. She asks whether that fact could "perhaps have influenced the proceedings, or rather, the lack of proceedings."

Day 12: The prosecutor realizes that in the first case, the search of the man's home requested by the former prosecutor was never carried out, and that the prosecutor never followed up on the case. None of the judges in office at the time know anything about the case.

Day 13: The victim's family testifies together with the young woman for the news cameras. They implicate the prosecutor and the police.

7th scenario:

5 pm: A pair of jewellers has just called the police. They report that they were attacked while leaving a casino, but that they managed to scare the thieves off by drawing a firearm (they had already been robbed several times). They give a very detailed description of the vehicle the attackers fled in, including the registration plate number.

5:30 pm: The vehicle is spotted by a patrol near the motorway.

5:35 pm: The vehicle tries to escape.

5:45 pm: The police manage to stop the vehicle.

5:50 pm: Once caught by the police, the individuals do not resist.

6 pm: The robbers claim that they are journalists and that they were recreating a scene for a television documentary. The patrol goes back to check the authenticity of their press cards.

6:30 pm: Their identities are confirmed: the three arrested persons are indeed journalists (1 is freelance and 2 are network employees). The network director and editor in chief are unreachable.

The journalists say they were in the process of recreating an event from the news that had occurred during the past year: a pensioner had robbed the casino in town, and had shot at police while fleeing, who then returned fire and killed him. The scene was to be aired during a report as part of a documentary series entitled "crimes and investigations" covering the case.

9 pm: The three journalists are released from custody.

The next day, the jewellers are interviewed in the local media and express their disgust.

8th scenario:

9 pm: There has just been a pile-up on the motorway.

9:30 pm: The right-hand side of a Spanish truck has run into a bus full of Spanish tourists, causing an enormous pile-up involving another eight cars and another truck on a major holiday travel day.

9:45 pm: The emergency services are overwhelmed. Five adults and three children travelling in cars were killed instantly. Firefighters are working on extricating the passengers trapped in the bus and 2 of the cars.

10 pm: The driver of the second truck was slightly injured.

As for the cars, 10 passengers (including 7 children) were injured as well.

2 other children were seriously injured and need to be airlifted out.

The extrication of the passengers from 2 of the cars is in progress. Both of the occupants of one of the cars and the driver of another are seriously injured but conscious.

As for the bus, which is lying on its side, rescue operations are proving to be more difficult.

11 pm: the driver of the truck that caused the accident said he was on his way back to Spain after making a delivery in Germany, and was then set to go back to Italy to make another delivery. He explains that the pace required to keep up with the delivery deadlines gave him no time to sleep as much as he needed. He thinks he must have fallen asleep. He has collapsed and is in a state of shock. He explains that his employer - who is also his father - cannot employ more than one driver and increase the number of separate deliveries because of the high motorway costs in certain countries. The man is arrested.

2:00 am: Once extrication operations are complete for the bus passengers, the results are as follows:

- 7 new deaths reported, for a total of 15.
- 3 seriously injured persons evacuated, for a total of 8.
- 10 slightly injured persons, for a total of 21.

The next morning: the media announce a nationwide protest by truck drivers.

9th scenario:

3:40 pm: Several calls coming from the same working-class area of the city report that a child has been wounded by gunfire.

4:50 pm: The child is pronounced dead.

4:15 pm: The child's identity, as reported by neighbours in this block of buildings, is confirmed by the mother, who was informed by her neighbours.
Boubacar was 13 years old.

4:50 pm: The police, alerted by the neighbours, approach Kevin, 16 years old, lying in a corner of the park where the incident occurred. He is introduced to them as a friend of Boubacar's. Kevin is constantly wailing: "I thought it was just a toy."

6 pm: Kevin is at the police station. He was taken there promptly, for his protection and to take care of him as well.

He admits he shot Boubacar; he says that he took the weapon from his father's bedroom. It was the first time he'd played with it. He doesn't know what "loading a gun" means.

6:30 pm: Kevin's father shows investigators the box containing the weapon. The loaded firearm had been stored away in its box above the wardrobe in his bedroom. Yes, he had talked to his son about it once. But that was long ago. He has no firearm permit, and claims that he didn't think he needed to have one. The weapon had belonged to his father, now deceased. He is self-confident and convinced that he's done nothing wrong. He does not see what the problem is. He is arrested.