



## **MEDIA CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE 2010/2011**

There may be occasions when incidents arise that could result in negative press for Rotary. This document provides guidance and essential phone numbers for use in a crisis situation.

### **A possible scenario could be:**

A Rotary club has sponsored an exchange student from another country or hosted a Group Study Exchange team. Then the student or one of the GSE team members encounters an emergency. While club leaders work with authorities and relatives to resolve the situation, the news media get wind of the crisis, the club is suddenly bombarded with interview requests. The resulting news coverage generates more attention and raises sensitive issues within the community. This scenario is familiar to many clubs worldwide.

Other scenarios could include alleged criminal activity from a Rotarian or an accident during a Rotary event.

When a media crisis arises or is likely to arise, information should be cascaded as follows:

- Rotarian to contact club president and alert them of the situation.
- Club President to contact DG and DCC
- For information only - DCC to contact RIBI PR Officer at Alcester
- For information only - RIBI PR Officer to contact and inform rest of Media Crisis Committee (see appendix D)

### **What to do when you become aware of a possible negative story:**

- Gather all the facts. Record these carefully saying what happened when, who said what to whom and what is due to happen next. This must be an accurate record of events as it will be needed to refer to later to prevent confusion.
- Notify your Club President and DG of the situation.
- Club President, DG and DCC to decide who will be the main spokesperson. This person will receive all media enquiries. This should be someone who is on top of the issue, communicates well and is comfortable interacting with the media.
- Brief your club members about the situation and tell them not to talk directly to the media, asking them to refer all media calls to the elected spokesperson.
- DCC will inform PR Officer who in turn will notify the Media Crisis Committee (consisting of RIBI President, Immediate Past President, Vice President, Vice President Elect, PR Officer, Head of Marketing, Secretary/CEO and Chair of Marketing, PR and Communications Committee). This Committee will be able to offer expert advice.
- In most cases, when the media are not yet aware of the situation, producing a reactive statement will be the most efficient course of action. This statement should be held by the spokesperson and only released if the media gets wind of the situation. The statement should accurately state the facts, express Rotary's position and convey the appropriate tone (sympathy, apology, commitment etc). Update as needed.
- In exceptional circumstance, management of the crisis may be assumed by RIBI if the incident is likely to attract media attention beyond local journalists. The seriousness of the incident could also be a deciding factor. If this happens, the Media Crisis Committee will work with your club to decide on the best course of action.

### **What to do if contacted by the media:**

- Do something to buy a little time and try not to be drawn into a conversation with the journalist. Assure the journalist that you will pass the enquiry on at once to an informed spokesperson who will call them back quickly. **Do not say** 'I'll have to check what you've said' or 'I will find out what's going on'. A better answer is, 'You've caught me at a busy time, I will ask the Press Officer to contact you/ I will give you our Press Officer's contact name and number.'
- **Never answer** 'no comment' as it makes Rotary look suspicious.
- Ask:
  - Who is calling – including job title
  - Which publication or programme they are calling from
  - Their direct line phone number
  - What they want to know
  - When their deadline is due
- Respond to all media calls promptly. Ignoring media can contribute to unnecessary speculation. A media interview is a good opportunity to convey the facts and Rotary's position to the public.
- Monitor media coverage of the issue for accuracy and tone. If Rotary is misrepresented, let them know via a polite call or a letter to the editor. Do not be defensive or discourteous even if you may feel Rotary is being very unfairly represented.

### **In summary, don't panic!**

By centralising all information and contact through the PR officer, we can ensure that consistent messages are given out in a controlled fashion and that all relevant parties are kept well informed.

It also limits the amount of work and responsibility you and your club have to endure and you will receive support from the PR officer at all times.

## **Checklist**

Have you or your club:

- Contacted the DG, the DCC and ensured the RIBI PR officer has been informed?
- Decided on the strategy you want to take, both short and long term?
- Appointed a spokesperson?
- Decided, in conjunction with the spokesperson and the RIBI PR officer on the key messages?
- Briefed club members on the situation?
- Approved the statements compiled by the spokesperson and RIBI PR officer?
- Passed any media enquiries on to the spokesperson and RIBI PR officer?

## **APPENDIX A**

### **What the spokesperson should say:**

- Be completely honest and truthful. Don't say anything you are unsure of. Do not cover up or make excuses.
- As a spokesperson, you represent Rotary. When you speak you are Rotary. Avoid personal observations or speculations.
- Release as much information as you can about the crisis in a statement and put on a human face – We care, show sympathy, concern and understanding; maybe even regret.
- Offer reassurance that there is no further danger. Show that it is an isolated incident.
- Explain what you are currently doing to control the situation and that you are investigating the causes of it.
- Accept the fact that the journalist's job is to ask difficult questions. Remain pleasant and be as accommodating as possible.
- It is acceptable to ask about what the line of questioning is likely to be and even the first questions before the interview starts although there is no guarantee that they will stick to the plan.
- Organise your thoughts and speak in short, simple sentences. Think of each as a headline, supported by facts and examples. Headline: "The safety of Youth Exchange participants is our top priority". Support: "Every student completes a detailed orientation programme; background checks are required for all adults in the programme; etc."

- Strengthen your main message with a personal, relevant story: “As a parent of a student who has gone on an exchange, I know what it’s like to worry about a child thousands of miles away.”
- If the situation involves a police investigation or other formal proceeding, emphasise that Rotary is cooperating fully.
- Control your voice tone and body language to avoid coming across as defensive, nervous or hostile.
- Always thank the reporter for his or her time and offer to be available for follow-up questions.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Mistakes to avoid:**

- Avoid “off-the-record” comments especially when you think the interview is over; the interview is not over until the journalists leaves. If you don’t want something reported don’t say it at all.
- Avoid rumour, especially when dealing with serious topics.
- Avoid Rotary jargon and acronyms (DG, GSE, RYLA, District 1234) that the general public will not understand.
- Avoid repeating the negative portion of a question. If the question is: “Did your club fail to adequately protect the student?” consider an answer such as: “The safety of exchange students is our highest priority.”
- Avoid the term “no comment” because it carries a negative connotation. When possible, explain why you can’t answer a particular question (“Sorry I don’t have that information”) or say why you cannot comment (because an official investigation is in progress; a lawsuit has been filed, etc.) Then bridge back to the important point or key message.
- You might have several points to make, but remember that the audience (readers, viewers and listeners) will not remember more than two or three items at the most. Also, although the incident is the most important story for you at the moment, it may not be the most important for them.
- State clearly to the media when and where further information will be made available.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Agreed Rotary facts:**

- Rotary is a community based organisation serving local, national and international communities
- Rotary is active in nearly 200 countries and geographical regions and has 1.2 million members in over 33,000 clubs
- In UK and Ireland, there are 1,845 clubs with more than 55,000 members.
- Rotary is non-political and does not discriminate on grounds of age, sex, creed or religion
- Rotarians are actively involved in educational and humanitarian programmes using their professional and business skills
- Rotary is trusted by major International partners to deliver large scale health, education and humanitarian programmes
- Rotarians live by a code of ethics and are united world-wide to create a better environment for all in which to live
- Programme involvements are in the main areas of Water, Literacy, Health & Hunger and Polio Eradication
- Rotary, working with the WHO, has immunised over 2 billion children against Polio. It is the largest public health campaign the world has ever seen

## APPENDIX D

### RIBI Media Crisis Committee 2010/11:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Tel. Private</b>	<b>Mob</b>
Rebecca Wallace	PR Officer	01789 768 127	07988 160 674
Jim Moulson	President	0141 884 6438	07906 660 997
Ray Burman	Vice President	01842 828891	07776395286
David Fowler	Immediate Past President	01886 884 690	07735 440806
John Minhinick	Vice President Elect	01383 860145	07917602484
Annemarie Harte	Secretary/CEO	0121 694 0147	07872 137580
David Bryant	Head of Marketing & Communications	01905 424883	07973 725111
Tony Bacon	Chair Marketing, PR & Communications Committee	01494 563479	07784 507455
Bob Tomlinson	Rotarian Media Advisor	0141 776 4315	07718 451084