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## Crisis Communications: Keeping Political Leaders Informed of Emergency Response Efforts

### SUMMARY

The news media often ask elected representatives to comment on emergency response efforts, even if those representatives are not official spokespersons. Incident managers should create a crisis communications plan that identifies and prepares key elected representatives for such media queries.

### DESCRIPTION

Mayor Steven L. Abrams of Boca Raton, Florida disclosed that during the 2001 anthrax attacks, federal and state agencies did not inform him of major developments in the investigation or medical response. These developments included the identification of additional victims, the incident's classification as a criminal matter, and the discovery of anthrax-contaminated post offices. Consequently, Mayor Abrams had to rely on the television news and other secondhand sources of information. He believes that his inability to provide the media with original insight made him appear "out of the loop" and fostered a public perception that response efforts were disorganized.

Incident managers and public affairs officers should establish a crisis communications plan. This plan should identify key elected representatives and the processes for relaying critical information so these officials convey accurate information during a crisis. Informed elected representatives will help meet the heavy demand for information and reassure the public about response efforts.

For more information see the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Best Practice: "Crisis Communications Planning: Creating a Crisis Communications Plan."

### CITATION

Hon. Steven L. Abrams, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government Information, Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 6 November 2001. ([http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/sept\\_11/abrams.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/sept_11/abrams.htm))

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