

“BACK TO NORMAL” – WHATEVER THAT MAY LOOK LIKE

The reputation management challenge for a city as it comes out of a crisis situation is convincing the public that things have returned to normal, or at least have settled into a new kind of "normal." The media will play a crucial role in this undertaking, since it will serve as your citizens' eyes and ears in City Hall and throughout the community.

Here are a few ideas that can help show the media that things are heading back to normal:

- **Site Visits:** If the crisis impacted specific locations in your city – a collapsed bridge, a damaged water treatment plant, a derailed freight train – consider a media tour to show how successful recovery efforts have allowed operations to resume. If possible, give reporters access to places they're not usually invited, such as the treatment plant's control room or the non-public areas of a fire station. Reporters often welcome the opportunity to see the inner workings of government operations, especially if you can provide a visual component.
- **Accentuate the Positive:** When the crisis begins to lose its urgent news value, reporters will begin looking for something else to cover. Rather than wait for them to find something on their own, begin providing them tips on story angles that will put the city or its services in a positive light. Some may still be crisis-related, such as heartwarming stories of how unlikely heroes helped their neighbors through the crisis or how city crews worked around the clock to restore services that had been interrupted. But other story ideas may have nothing to do with the crisis, but are feel-good stories that can help shift the focus away from the challenges of the crisis and toward the many positive aspects of life in your city.
- **Get Back to the Grind:** Just as city operations and the pace of community life will settle back to normal (or a new version of "normal"), so will your relationships with members of the media. Transition away from the practices that were part of your crisis response, such as conducting daily (or more frequent) briefings while refusing hallway chatter and off-the-record conversations with reporters. Instead, re-establish whatever ground rules applied to your dealings with the media before the crisis struck. And be sure to use any opportunity to promote positive things happening in the community.

The crisis is over, and things can finally return to normal. Until the next one hits.