

The New Hampshire Association of Volunteer Administrators (NHAVA) has published an excellent resource, “Risk Management for Volunteer Program Administration.” A copy of this manual is available in all ten UNHCE county offices.

When risks are managed well, an organization is free to do its work, staff and volunteers have confidence in performing their assignments, bad surprises are avoided and situations that cannot be avoided are controlled. As it is the responsibility of the organization to protect volunteers, staff, clients, program, property, resources and reputation, risk management is a part of the organization’s volunteer program development. *It is required. It is not a choice.*¹

The following definitions, also from NHAVA, help to introduce the topic of managing risk in working with volunteers.

- **Risk** is the chance or the uncertainty of loss.
- **Risk Management** is the adoption of practices that acknowledge and control risk, thereby protecting the organization against potential losses.
- **Volunteer**. An individual who performs hours of service for a civic, charitable, or a public agency for humanitarian reasons without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered is considered to be a volunteer. There are no limitations or restrictions imposed by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) on the types of services which private individuals may volunteer to perform for these agencies.²

Section 8 brings together all the latest references needed for paid and volunteer staff to be ready to manage any risks. The following link is the University of New Hampshire Human Resources Department’s web page on volunteers and is a succinct reference guide: <http://www.unh.edu/hr/volunteers.htm>.

Reducing Risk for Volunteers is a fact sheet describing methods to reduce the risk of harm to program participants, volunteers and staff. Use the following link to this handy five-page summary:

http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001367_Rep1831.pdf. For volunteers working with youth, see Reducing Risk for 4-H Volunteers at http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000180_Rep198.pdf, as well as the information below under “Volunteers Working with Youth.

¹ “Risk Management for Volunteer Program Administration,” published by the New Hampshire Association of Volunteer Administrators, 2007, p.2.

² Ibid, p. 5.

Crisis Planning, Emergency Procedures & Incident/Accident Reporting

Reporting an Incident, Accident, Injury

There are *two forms* used by UNHCE to report an incident, accident, injury etc. The first is required to be filed by University of New Hampshire policy and the second is an internal UNHCE document used to document an incident.

(1) UNH Report of Incident (Accident, Injury or Illness) Form

UNH Cooperative Extension employees who are injured on the job MUST complete a University of New Hampshire Report of Incident (Accident, injury, illness) form available at:

http://www.unh.edu/hr/sites/unh.edu.hr/files/pdfs/report_of_occupational_injury_or_illness_rev_3-22-2011.pdf (form with instructions). (The following link is the official UNH webpage for Workers' Compensation information and forms: <http://unhinfo.unh.edu/hr/wc.htm>.)

Volunteers, program participants and guests should also complete this form if they are injured or involved in an incident or accident while attending or participating in an event sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension. This form is to be submitted immediately following the incident (within 24 hours). The UNH Cooperative Extension employee supervising the event will submit the completed form to their supervisor.

It is important to note however, that volunteers, program participants and guests are not covered by Workers' Compensation insurance. If medical treatment is necessary, do not report the incident to medical providers as a Workers' Compensation claim.

(2) UNHCE Accident/Injury/Incident Report Form

In addition to the required University of New Hampshire Report of Incident form, UNHCE also uses the UNHCE Accident/Injury/Incident Report form (http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000129_Rep142.pdf), especially when it pertains to volunteers and program participants. This form may seem to be repeating the UNH form, but its format does allow for more information and important details, and therefore it is also to be used in addition to the UNH form. It is required when the incident (accident/injury etc) involves volunteers, youth, visitors or program participants.

Both forms are submitted to the supervisor of the UNHCE employee supervising the event or volunteer, who will then submit them to the UNHCE Dean and Director's office (fax or electronic copy allowed with original following by US mail.) Ultimately, the form is sent to the University of New Hampshire Human Resource Office for processing/filing as a Workers' Compensation Report (for employees) or as documentation that an incident/injury/accident occurred. *Time is of the essence and if a supervisor is not available, forms should be sent directly to the UNHCE Dean and Director's office.*

It is important to note that an injured person cannot be forced to complete the form, if the injured person is not willing or able to complete the form. In this case, the UNHCE employee supervising the event should document the situation carefully using these 2 forms. It is important to include the names and addresses of witnesses. Should the University form not exactly meet

your needs, complete the form as much as possible and attach a signed and dated narrative to the form including any additional pertinent data. The UNHCE form can also be attached to give further details (additional witness names, whether the police/fire/rescue are called, etc.)

If a report form is not immediately available, minimal documentation would include (until the required report forms can be completed):

- o Date, time and exact location of the incident
- o Names, addresses and phone numbers of those involved
- o Description of the accident/incident and action taken
- o Names, addresses and phone numbers of any witnesses
- o The name, address and phone number of the person filling out the report and the date the report was written.

Use a Safety Checklist

Wherever UNH Cooperative Extension staff and volunteers are working, it is important to insure that the environment is safe and that appropriate steps will be taken to correct deficiencies. Using a safety checklist can help insure that you are providing a safe environment for both staff and volunteers. The following link is for the Safety Checklist used by 4-H Youth Development Program and can be adapted for any program or setting involving volunteers or the public:

http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001175_Rep1493.doc

Risk Management: The Crisis Plan

(This section is contributed by Sally W. Barney, Former Extension Specialist)

No one ever wants their event or activity to turn into a crisis situation; but it could happen. Those planning major events or activities should talk ahead of time about the procedures that will be followed if a crisis occurs. By planning ahead you will be ready to deal as effectively as possible with a bad situation. Crisis planning should be a part of all event planning. Experience shows that those organizations best able to survive a crisis are those which anticipate and plan for such an emergency. What you do following an incident not only may save lives or reduce injuries, it can also prevent the misery and negative publicity of a lawsuit.

Are you sufficiently prepared to provide leadership in case of a fire, in the case of a tornado, hurricane, flood, or in case a youth or adult is severely injured or dies while participating in your program? A crisis plan will not make the situation go away, but it can assist you in acting as capably as is possible during the crisis.

Everyone, employees and volunteers, should understand and follow procedures to respond to and report an accident or crisis. Basic precautions and preparations should be a part of all event planning. When working as a co- sponsor within the confines of a larger activity such as a fair, conference, or exposition work with the planners to see that a crisis plan is in place. At a minimum:

- Designate a person to be “in charge” should a crisis occur.

- Understand the evacuation procedures for the building and/or rooms you will be using. Review evacuation plans with those persons at the event who are in positions of leadership; be sure to include evacuation plans for persons with disabilities.
- Have emergency phone numbers available in conference packets and if possible posted near the phones.
- Designate one spokesperson to talk to the media.
- Do inform your Program Leader and/or Director.

Have a plan for reacting to emergencies. The plan explains the roles of staff members during an emergency. Have a way to activate the plan. Following a need to activate the plan, review and revise as appropriate.

There are several guidelines that will help you through the crisis:

- Care for injured persons immediately; call trained medical personnel as needed. Express concern for the injured persons, but do not admit or imply that you are or might be liable. Try not to say anything about why the accident/injury occurred.
- Keep the lines of communication open. People who do not get prompt answers to their questions may assume the worst.
- Identify witnesses and get their names, addresses and phone numbers. Carefully preserve physical evidence. Get pictures of the scene if possible and appropriate.
- Record your recollection of the incident and encourage others involved to do the same as soon as possible.
- Do not talk about the incident without consulting your supervisor; he or she may recommend you talk to UNH legal counsel. Do contact your UNH Cooperative Extension supervisor.
- Support the people affected by the incident. The distress of persons involved in an incident is often made worse by isolation.
- Be prepared to deal with the media. Delegate one official spokesperson; this allows you to tell one story without conflicting details. You might want to contact legal counsel before making an official statement.

Some situations are truly horrible. The death of a program participant, volunteer, or staff member is so tragic that we don't like to think about it; but a death could occur while a person is participating in an Extension activity. In dealing with a death:

- The UNH Cooperative Extension staff person in charge must assume full leadership.

- Your Program Leader and Director must be notified.
- Notification of family is always done in person if possible and should be made by the Extension Program Leader and staff if possible.
- You may call UNH legal counsel for advice.
- Names of individuals involved should never be released to the media until next of kin are notified; but anticipate calls and inquiries from the media.
- Keep program participants not involved occupied elsewhere and get back to a routine with them as soon as possible.

Report injuries promptly following UNH Cooperative Extension guidelines (see **Reporting an Incident, Accident, Injury** above.). Remember, in case of accident or injury, your rules and policies will come under scrutiny. Don't have rules you can't follow. Once you set rules, communicate them effectively and maintain good records showing what the rules are.

Volunteers Working with Youth

4-H Youth Development and several other UNHCE volunteer programs, involve extensive volunteer interaction with youth and their families. Serving as a positive role model for participants and setting a good example for their actions and behavior are especially important with a youth audience, as are youth safety and parental communication. The 4-H program has developed a screening process and a fact sheet for volunteers working with youth, which covers some of the special considerations for these volunteers. Please contact the UNHCE Extension Specialist, Volunteer Development & Management for access to these resources. See also "Reducing Risk for 4-H Volunteers" at http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000180_Rep198.pdf on the 4-H Volunteers/Volunteer Resources page.

UNH Cooperative Extension Policy for Prevention of Child Abuse

According to New Hampshire law RSA 169-C, the Child Protection Act (<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XII/169-C/169-C-mrg.htm>), an abused child is any child who has been sexually abused, intentionally physically injured, psychologically injured, or physically injured by other than accidental means. Abused and/or neglected children are protected under New Hampshire law.

Volunteers must know that if they suspect that a UNHCE program participant is being abused, they must contact their volunteer supervisor for guidance in reporting. By the above law, any suspected child abuse must be reported to the Bureau of Child and Family Services, New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families. Failure to report is a misdemeanor. (See below "Procedure for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse.")

Volunteers should avoid the potential of child abuse allegations (real or perceived) by having at least three people (adults and/or youth) present during all activities involving youth.

For further information see the Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Child Protection website: <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/cps/contact.htm>.

Screening Volunteers Working with Youth

Any UNHCE volunteer, 18 years and older, who works directly with youth without the presence or direct supervision of paid Extension staff must be screened before they are officially appointed to work with youth. In cooperative efforts, Extension staff will work with cooperating agencies, organizations, and schools to ensure that volunteers are appropriately screened.

The screening procedure for working directly with youth includes a volunteer application form, a personal interview, three personal letters of reference and a signed volunteer agreement.

Paid and volunteer staff working directly with children will be provided information about identifying possible signs of child abuse. Staff training will include approved procedures for responding to and reporting the suspicion of child abuse.

Administrative staff responsible for supervision of programs involving the care of children will make unannounced visits to each program site to assure standards, policies, program quality, and staff performance are being maintained. Visits and records of these visits shall be kept in conjunction with affirmative action reports.

Staff Relationships with Children

To protect individuals, paid and volunteer staff are encouraged to avoid, where possible, being alone with a single child.

Paid and volunteer staff shall be encouraged not to socialize with program participants under the age of 18 outside of Extension program activities.

Paid and volunteer staff will not, under any circumstances, discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care such as food or shelter. They will also not participate in verbal or emotional abuse such as swearing at children or subjecting them to a degrading act.

Procedure for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

When there is suspicion of child abuse, paid or volunteer staff who are suspicious of abuse occurring, or to whom it has been reported, will immediately inform the Extension staff person responsible for the Extension program involved. In most cases this will probably be the county Extension educator. It must be stressed that the reporting of a suspected child abuse situation is a personal, professional and legal obligation under RSA 169-C, the NH Child Protection Act (<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XII/169-C/169-C-mrg.htm>).

The Extension staff person receiving the report, along with the person reporting the alleged abuse, will report to the NH Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). **The DCYF Central Intake phone number is 1-800-894-5533.**

If the reported incident involves a paid Extension staff person or program volunteer, the Program Leader will suspend the person from all activities involving the supervision of and contact with children; reassignment to administrative functions may be appropriate in some cases. Suspension will continue pending outcome of the investigation by DCYF.

Regardless of where or under what circumstances the alleged incident takes place, if a paid staff person is involved, it will be considered as job related and affecting job performance.

Reinstatement of a paid or volunteer staff member will occur only after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the Program Leader and the investigating agency.

Paid and volunteer staff will be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of information in this area. Paid and volunteer staff will be instructed to discuss matters pertaining to abuse and suspected abuse only with appropriate Extension representatives, DCYF officials and law enforcement persons.

Volunteers and paid Cooperative Extension staff should not take it upon themselves to contact the parents/guardians of children involved in an alleged child abuse incident. Decisions on how and when to contact parents/guardians is always made by DCYF. Failure to work with DCYF in this situation could put a child in serious danger.

Responsibilities to Parents

Parents shall be encouraged to visit Extension programs at any time.

Each county office of UNH Cooperative Extension will maintain a file of information related to the subject of child abuse. This information will be made available to parents and children upon request.

Support for Cooperative Extension Staff

Volunteer and paid staff of UNH Cooperative Extension should contact their Program Leader, 4-H Youth Development Specialist, Human Development Specialist, or other appropriate specialist if they have questions, require consultation, or need advice of either a general or specific nature regarding child abuse.

County and State Extension offices are urged to share copies of the UNH Cooperative Extension policies related to child abuse with clientele, cooperating agencies and organizations.

Youth as Volunteers

When using youth volunteers, both the organization and the youth reap many benefits; however, there are risks associated with engaging youth and additional measures are required. When using

youth volunteers, service descriptions should reflect compliance with child labor restrictions regarding hazardous occupations, licensing, parental consent and time frame of volunteer service.

UNHCE assumes the duty to exercise a reasonable degree of care to protect the youth from foreseeable harm. Using youth volunteers requires more intensive screening of those adults who will be supervising the young people.

It is critical to assign appropriate tasks and it is critical tasks assigned are appropriate. Adult supervision needs to be provided. The organization has a responsibility to provide careful supervision and consider the risks of unacceptable behavior by the young volunteer. Those youth under the age of 18 years of age can only volunteer under the supervision of staff or a screened volunteer. The youth must be enrolled in an Extension youth program, have written permission of a parent or guardian and the volunteer experience must be a component of their Extension learning experience. The volunteer services assigned to a minor shall be performed in a non-hazardous environment and should comply with all pertinent requirements. Code of Conduct/Permission forms and clear program rules can help provide these measures.

See the following resources:

- New Hampshire 4-H Event Youth Code of Conduct and 4-H Activity Youth Permission and Release Form [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000067_Rep69.pdf]
- New Hampshire 4-H Event Adult Code of Conduct and 4-H Activity Adult Permission and Release Form [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001238_Rep1587.pdf]

Volunteers and Child Labor Laws

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), Section 553.100

(<http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr;sid=d8a7fe6c72c093927a99206a6dfbe905;rgn=div5;view=text;node=29%3A3.1.1.1.29;idno=29;cc=ecfr>), “an individual who performs hours of service for a public agency for civic charitable or humanitarian reasons without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered is considered to be a volunteer during such hours for the purpose of the FLSA.” Further, “Section 3(e) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, as amended in 1985, provides that individuals performing volunteer services for units of State and local governments will not be regarded as “employees” under the statute.”

Also, the volunteer shall not displace a worker essential to the operation of the business and the hours given are usually on a part-time/temporary basis. The U.S. Congress, through the FLSA, set up these guidelines to prevent manipulation or abuse of minimum wage or overtime requirements through coercion or undue pressure upon individuals to “volunteer” their services. An individual is not considered a volunteer if the individual is otherwise employed by the same public agency to perform the same type of services as those for which the individual proposes to volunteer. An example of this would be a nurse employed by a State Hospital volunteering to perform services at a State-operated health clinic which is not a separate public entity. On the other hand, a police officer who volunteers time as a referee in a basketball league sponsored by the city does not constitute “same type of service.”

Youth under the age of sixteen (16) who volunteer more than three (3) calendar days for any one agency or organization may be found to be covered by RSA: 276-A, the New Hampshire Youth Employment Law (<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XXIII/276-A/276-A-mrg.htm>), and any organization for which a minor volunteers their services is advised to have the youth obtain a “NH Youth Employment Certificate” through the principal’s office at his/her school. “Internships” and “school to work” programs are not employee/employer arrangements. They are considered an extension of the classroom as long as the specific program has been approved by the New Hampshire Department of Labor.

For more information on youth labor laws see:

http://www.labor.state.nh.us/youth_employment.asp?ptype=text

For more information on labor and labor laws, see the New Hampshire Department of Labor’s website, <http://www.labor.state.nh.us/> or call 603-271-3176.

Managing Risk in Working with Volunteers: Special Topics

As noted in the introduction to this manual, we must consider and manage risk at all levels and steps of the I.S.O.T.U.R.E volunteer management process. However, there are several topics of risk management that deserve special attention (or which did not logically fit into the ISOTURE framework), and those we include in this chapter.

Legal Considerations

Knowledge about legal issues is critical in our current litigious society. Lawsuits abound involving nonprofit agencies, and protecting oneself against them is an important skill. Understanding applicable law is not as difficult as it might seem, and we include the following, developed by former UNHCE specialist Judith Lonergan, which explains the basics of legal matters that staff may encounter.

Risk Management for Volunteer Programs – Legal Issues

(This section is contributed by Judith Lonergan, Former Extension Specialist)

Two basic criteria in civil suits are LOSS and FAULT. It is not a function of the court system to develop rules or laws so that every injured person may find someone else to hold accountable. Before a person may collect money for damages caused by someone else, it must be established that the first person suffered a loss (e.g. physical injury, damage to property, loss of money, mental suffering) and the second person was at fault in causing the loss. More than one person may be sued for causing the same loss.

Tort Law

Tort is civil law, and a tort suit is a court action that allows legal recourse against someone who causes a loss. The plaintiff (the person suffering the loss and bringing the suit) must prove that the defendant (the person allegedly causing the loss) was liable.

Liability

Liability is a broad legal term, which assigns responsibility, both absolute and contingent. To summarize: the person suffering a loss may recover damages from the person(s) causing the loss, provided it can be proven that the latter was responsible for the loss.

In looking for proof of liability, the following are considered:

Due Care	Instruction and Supervision
Negligence	First Aid and Medical Treatment
Causation	Defamation (slander and libel)
Foreseeability	Assault and Battery
Property and Land	Statute of Limitations (Notice of Claim)

The following is a description of these terms:

Due Care

The standard for due care is that which any reasonable person would do or not do under similar circumstances. The court establishes determination of the standard of reasonableness. Reasonableness involves foreseeing a potential risk and taking steps to avoid it. Circumstances, however, play a part in determining reasonableness. There *exist assumption of risk doctrine*, wherein a person is fully aware of exposing him/herself to danger. If a person falls while skiing down a mountain, he/she is unlikely to recover damages from the company operating the ski area; however, if an injury is caused by a malfunction of the ski lift, damages are likely to be recovered.

Negligence

Negligence is the failure to use due care, which results in damage, injury, or other loss. To prove negligence, it must be shown that 1) the defendant did not use due care, and 2) the absence of that care was the main cause of the loss.

Causation

Causation involves the determination of the cause of the loss. To be held liable, it must be proven that negligence was the main cause of the loss. If there were other contributing factors the court weighs their influence by asking if they alone, without the negligence, would have caused the loss.

Foreseeability

To foresee something means it must be seen as probable. It does not mean that one has some sort of prophetic vision as to what might conceivably happen. It is foreseeable that broken stairs may cause a fall. It is not foreseeable, under normal circumstances, that a truck will crash into a building.

Property and Land

Reasonable efforts must be made by maintenance and operation to have property and land safe for those who enter. This includes property and land owned, leased, or borrowed. If it is foreseeable that a condition related to the property or land could cause a loss, an obligation

exists to fix the situation before the property is used. Another choice is not to use the property.

Instruction and Supervision

Supervisors are expected to provide proper instruction and adequate oversight to prevent accidents, injuries, and other losses. The greater the danger level, the more important this becomes. If a supervisor has been derelict, and the lack of instruction and/or supervision is found to be the main cause of the loss, the injured party may collect damages.

First Aid and Medical Treatment

When rendering first aid and medical treatment, a person may be held liable if he/she were working beyond their skill level. Due care may be calling for professional help, rather than assisting personally. Today, it is imperative to be aware of the risks related to blood and body fluids and to use due care when dealing with them.

Defamation (Slander and Libel)

Defamation is communication that harms another's reputation.

Slander is oral; libel is written or printed. One is especially liable when making false or malicious statements outside the scope of one's job description. All information is discoverable by the court, which means that letters, memos, recordings, computer disks and drives, etc. may need to be turned over.

Assault and Battery

Assault is an act that injures another person, by words, actions, or both. Battery is actual physical contact with another person. Liability requires proof of malice, of putting the other person in peril or threatened harm.

Statute of Limitation (Notice of Claim)

Most states place a limit on the number of years during which a suit may be filed following a loss. Minors suffering a loss may be given a greater number of years to file a claim.

Pre-Trial Statement

When a lawsuit comes to trial, a pre-trial statement is developed. While states differ, the following are usually part of the pre-trial statement, and they give an idea of the complexity of information required:

Uncontested facts	Plaintiff's specific claims of liability
Contested facts	Plaintiff's latest demand and Defendant's latest offer
Applicable law	List of depositions to be read
List of exhibits	Waiver of claims or defenses
Defenses	Disputed issues of law
Specification of injuries	Itemized statement of special damages (bills, wages)
List of witnesses	Length of trial (anticipated)
View (what the trial will be like)	Trial Attorney

Waivers

A waiver release form, or a consent form is often used to shield an organization from liability. They have value, but they do not release the organization from all liability. They do draw attention to the risk, and a participant's signature is proof that he/she was aware of the danger.

If a participant is a minor, the signature of a parent/guardian is proof that the latter was aware of what the youth would be doing and under what conditions. A minor may not sign his/her own waiver.

It is important to be as specific as possible when describing the activities. If youth are going to stay in a hotel where there is a swimming pool, the waiver should indicate this and ask for permission for the youth to swim. This avoids a parent saying, "If I had known he was going to swim, I never would have let him go."

If waivers are used, assure all participants provide one. It is helpful to have waivers days in advance of the activity, especially with youth. If allowed to bring them the day of the activity, someone is sure to forget his/hers, which means he/she should not be allowed to participate. (This becomes difficult when the bus is ready to leave!)

Permission for Medical Treatment

Medical personnel and facilities are likely to refuse treatment to any person without signed permission from the person needing aid, or in the case of a minor, from the parent/guardian. It is advisable to create a form giving this signed permission, require the submission of this form before the activity, and most importantly carry these forms with you to the activity. Confer with an attorney and/or a medical facility in designing this form. They may have samples for you to use or copy.

NOTE: The above section, Risk Management for Volunteer Programs – Legal Issues was written by Judith Lonergan (UNHCE) as part of a cooperative effort to train those responsible for volunteer programs. Cooperating are Terry Knowles, New Hampshire Dept. of Justice, Div. of Charitable Trusts; Cynthia Flynn, New Hampshire Dept. of Labor; and Linda Quinn, New Hampshire Association of Nonprofits; and Judith Lonergan, Lonergan Associates and the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Please give credit to this team when the information is duplicated or otherwise used in training. Thank you.

Dealing with the Media

Interaction with the media is a part of all areas of UNHCE work. Often we are working with the media in an effort to draw attention to successful programs. However, sometimes contact with the media comes as a result of a crisis or an undesirable event. In this instance, developing a media or communication strategy – ahead of time – can make the difference between accurate media coverage and bad press for your program or project. The following section, written by Sally W. Barney, Former 4-H Extension Specialist, is a fact sheet that helps plan for working with the media before – and during – times of "crisis."

Risk Management: Dealing with the Media

(This section is contributed by Sally W. Barney, Former Extension Specialist)

Just as you should be planning for a crisis before one occurs, you should be developing a crisis communication plan before it is needed. As with all crisis planning, planning ahead will help you handle a crisis situation.

In terms of dealing with the media, a good crisis communication plan works best if you currently have a good professional relationship with the media.

With a plan for media management, you have more opportunity to control and manage the message, story or statement your way during a crisis.

Every crisis communication plan should take into consideration the need the media has to be fully informed.

1. Have a crisis communication plan spelled out for all staff members and volunteers.
2. Appoint ONE spokesperson who will deal with the media. All statements are given by this person, and all questions are answered by this person. This person must be prepared to meet with the media.
3. Do assemble the facts and verify them.

Guidelines for spokesperson:

Take time before you speak to outline your main points and to prepare to meet the media. Every encounter with the media should be a carefully planned encounter and not thought of as “conversation”. By preparing ahead of time, you are less likely to talk yourself into a problem.

State your most important point(s) first then elaborate. Be honest.

Assume everything you say may be quoted or used. Don't be unnecessarily or indiscreetly candid. Assume nothing is off the record.

Do not use the phrase “no comment”, it often implies wrong doing. Instead, you might say “I am checking the details now” or something similar.

When you have answered a question, stop talking. Do not volunteer unnecessary information or comments.

It is the reporter's job to fill in the blank time not yours; wait for the reporter's next question. Don't let the reporter confuse you by their asking multiple questions at once.

If a reporter makes an incorrect assumption or uses an incorrect premise in stating a question, rephrase the question before giving your answer. Or, dismiss the statement in a polite way and make your point; don't try to answer a question which is incorrect as presented.

Don't let yourself be manipulated. If a reporter says, "would you say" and then quotes a statement for your agreement, don't feel you must agree.

Don't lose your temper with the media.

Don't let anyone else determine your agenda, particularly in a time of crisis. Make your own statement.

"What if" questions are very dangerous. One cannot discuss the hypothetical as accurately as they can the known facts.

Don't feel obligated to accept unfamiliar facts and figures; you can say "I'm sorry I am not familiar with those figures", and proceed with what you do know.

Practice information management. Don't bring up subjects you would rather not deal with. Keep to the issue, and keep people out of the debate. Never make a defamatory statement about anyone; you could find yourself defending the statement in a court of law.

UNH Cooperative Extension is an organization with highly successful programs. Even during crisis reporting, you can remind the media of our excellent programs which are meeting the needs of New Hampshire citizens.

(Acknowledgement is given to NH Farm Bureau and Boy Scouts of America.)

Copyright Laws

Volunteers and staff need to know the basics in copyright law when developing program materials. Please see this UNH Library website regarding Copyright Laws which is an excerpt from the USNH Policy Manual: <http://www.library.unh.edu/about/polreg/copyright.shtml>