



# NOAA FISHERIES

## NOAA Fisheries Risk/Crisis Communications Guide

**Purpose:** NOAA Fisheries created a risk/crisis communications guide (found on the [Inside Fisheries](#) intranet) to give the agency an agreed upon communications process that enables us to plan for risks and react to crises in a quick and coordinated fashion while earning the trust of our target audiences.



### TIPS

Use your judgment for risk vs. crisis, but the biggest differences are something that hasn't happened yet and allows for proactive planning verses something that has already happened and needs immediate response.

Notify your communications leads even if it's a "small" issue.

Keep leadership, communicators, and key staff informed throughout. Schedule daily internal meetings to coordinate, if needed.

Verify and clear information as it becomes available.

Schedule daily media availabilities to control the message if news is constantly changing.

Control the message online and be prepared to respond to misinformation.

Keep surprises to a minimum. Regions and science centers should notify headquarters even if it's a localized issue (see notification tree on page 2).

### Definitions

**Risk Communications:** We have the "luxury" of knowing in advance of a potential crisis and the opportunity, to some extent, to choose the timing of the communication to stakeholders and the public about the issue and our plan to resolve it. We can provide advance information about an expected event/issue, such as a sensitive or controversial ruling or science paper, that has a potentially adverse outcome and address the probability of that outcome occurring. We are in a proactive mode.

**Crisis Communications:** An event that occurs unexpectedly, such as an oil spill or other natural disaster. We have no control of the timing, and the issue may no longer be in our power to control or change the outcome. Such an event is time sensitive and might have a negative impact on our reputation. We are in a reactive mode.



## Communications Flow

One of the most important aspects of successful risk and crisis communications is to understand who to notify and when. There is a very precise order to follow to involve the right players at the right time and try to target the most important audiences first. Every situation will vary based on its complexity and where it falls on the risk/crisis scale.

## Risk/Crisis Communications Notification Tree

This notification tree reflects the basic communications flow we'd like to see at NOAA Fisheries for any issue that may require risk or crisis communications. It should start with notification of all key staff within NOAA Fisheries before notification moves forward to NOAA headquarters and so forth.

