

# LA Zoo Crisis Communication Plan-Disaster Plan



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MKCM 410-40: Crisis Communication

Champlain College

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## **Prevention**

### Introduction

The LA Zoo is home to over 200 species of animals and hosts over 1 million visitors a year. The opportunity to have a crisis that involves either a human or an animal (or an interaction between them) is high. The following crisis communication plan addresses the LA Zoo's need to be prepared for an environmental caused emergency or crisis. LA county is home to devastating wildfires, earthquakes, and this year, faced historical monsoonal rains and flooding.

In the wake of a natural crisis, the LA Zoo needs to be prepared to face a number of secondary crisis that are caused by the disruption and attention from a natural crisis like a wildfire.

In recent years, Zoos have been under attack by animal rights advocates who advertise that animals in captivity do not have a high quality of life, and have lobbied, petitioned and demonstrated against organizations like the LA Zoo.

An natural emergency is a stressful situation for everybody, human and animal alike, the LA Zoo needs to be prepared if there are any injury or fatality events that are related to the primary natural emergency.

### Facilities and Infrastructure Prevention

The LA Zoo is situated in a high fire danger zone within Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) jurisdiction. LAFD as well as the California State Fire Authority (CALFire) has helped design the LA Zoo to meet the requirements of a stand alone structure, meaning, with minimal work from fire personnel, the LA Zoo facility will be a safe place to shelter in place even if a fire moves through the Zoo grounds.

All animals will have a designated indoor and ventilated facility that meet the CALFire requirements for shelter in place dwellings.

Additionally, the LA Zoo has installed fire sprinkler systems, fire protection boxes (with fire fighting equipment pre connected to high powered water sources) and has a large water tank that is gravity fed that will act as an emergency irrigation systems that will work in case of a power outage.

The LA Zoo will maintain a core staff that is trained to assist LAFD personnel to activate the fire sprinkler system, deploy the fire protection lines, and inspect the water tank.

These facilities are inspected biannually and an annual drill will be conducted with LAFD and core LA Zoo staff.

In the Annual meeting, the LAFD Incident Command team will work together with the LA Zoo Crisis team to form and maintain relationships so in the place of an emergency, the teams are well acquainted and are working on mutual objectives and common goals.

## Preparation

### Crisis Communication Team in a Wildfire response

President/CEO LA Zoo

Head of Animal Care, LA Zoo

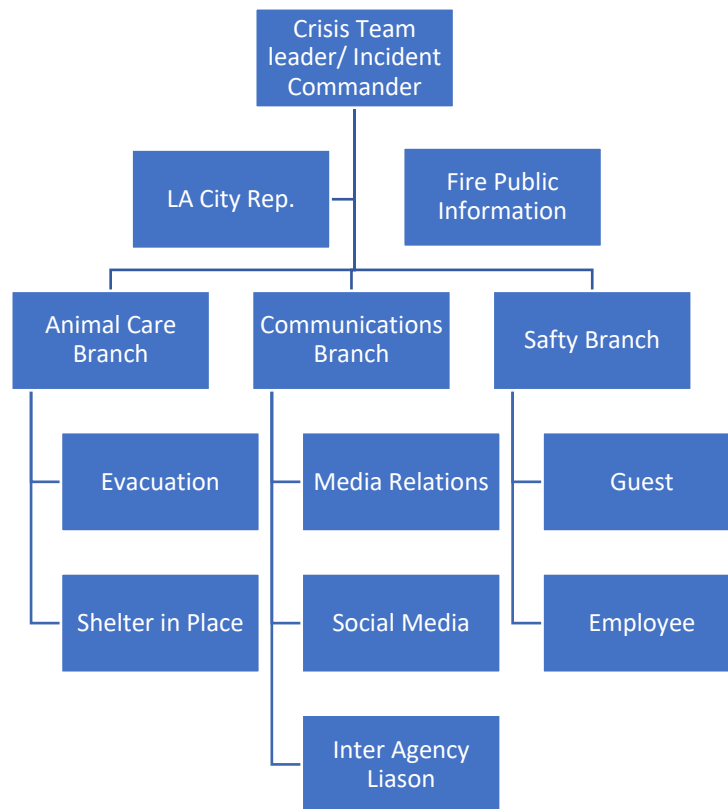
Public Relations, LA Zoo

LA City Representative

Safety Director

LA City Fire Public Information Officer

In the event of a Natural Crisis, the LA Zoo will have the designated hierarchy of command. Individual names will be filled if vacancies occur. Each specific branch will have a number of subordinates who will all report to one and only one supervisor. This structure is a modified version of the Federal Incident Command Structure (ICS). (Appendix A)



## Cooperator Relationships

LA City Fire Department (LAFD) will have jurisdiction of the wildfire, but will have a designated public information officer (PIO) who will work with the LA Zoo Crisis team to act as an information liaison. There will be a mandatory annual planned drill, and review, biannual facility inspections and emergency planning meetings that LAFD will be invited to and encouraged to attend.

In the Annual meeting, the LAFD Incident Command team will work together with the LA Zoo Crisis team to form and maintain relationships so in the place of an emergency, the teams are well acquainted and are working on mutual objectives and common goals.

## Crisis Plan Overview

The LA Zoo is vulnerable to many different types of crisis, it is vital to be aware of a crisis climate and how they may impact the Zoo Infrastructure, employees, resident animals, stakeholders and city officials.

For all of the identified issues, there should be a written plan that can be referenced if any of the identified issues turn into a crisis. Every Issue has warning signs, and predictive indicators, as well as risk mitigation practices. Each outlined issue has the potential to be catastrophic to the LA Zoo image. Due to the complexity of being in the media center of the country, the LA Zoo needs to be fast, efficient and proactive to make statements and handle crisis immediately.

**This communications plan will further identify steps to take and examples of procedures to follow in case of a Natural Crisis and a Wildland fire threatens the LA Zoo.** However, the LA Zoo needs to be prepared for a multitude of crisis events. Any one crisis may lead to further secondary crisis events that will need to be addressed. This crisis communication plan is tailored specifically for a wildland fire event, but can be adapted using the same foundation for prevention, preparation, response, and revision model.

## Crisis Scenario Planning

Some examples of relevant crisis that the LA Zoo may face are listed, and each will have their own preparation and response appendices.

Natural Crisis: i.e. being impacted by wildfire or unhealthy air quality from a nearby wildfire. This is a high risk, low frequency event, but is so carefully planned and practiced because of the complexity and the amount of logistics and man power required to keep both guests, employees and animals in care safe from a physical natural Crisis like a fire or flood, but also from secondary and tertiary effects as in smoke, lack of access, disrupted schedules ect.

Personal Crisis: Animal injury or fatality. The LA Zoo has some of the oldest animals in captivity for respective species. End of life care and euthanasia are something the LA Zoo has and will continue to handle.

Organizational Crisis: i.e. LA City officials making statements that contrast the LA Zoo Vision Statement, and appearing disconnected and unorganized to the public, leading to lack of support. The LA Zoo is owned and operated by the City of Los Angeles, they deal with difficult politics in a high profile city. In the past, city officials have been on record, or have posted to official social media accounts and made statements that contradict an official LA Zoo statement.

Confrontational Crisis: i.e. Animal Rights Advocates negative attitudes on animal in captivity, leading towards negative public attitudes, lack of support, and lack of donors/ticket sales. This is a crisis that every animal care facility has faced in some fashion since the beginning of animals in captivity. This is an issue that will likely never go away, but accomplished AZA organizations like the LA Zoo keep this issue from turning into a crisis with careful monitoring and communications.

Personal Crisis: i.e. negative animal/human interaction leading to injuries or fatalities to humans or animals. Whether accidental or intentional, this is a very real issue to avoid turning into a crisis. This risk mitigation begins at exhibit design, and creating infrastructure to keep people and animals separate so they can not harm one another. Unfortunately, there have been cases at other establishments that have been fatal for both animals in care and guests. Mitigation is not enough, there needs to be a ready-to-deploy crisis plan ready to implement if an event occurs.

Technological Crisis: i.e. the badges and number pads that allow authorized personnel into animal enclosures, (and keep unauthorized personnel out) fails and creates other crisis as a result. The LA Zoo would not be the first large organization to have contacted technology/security company that experienced a second hand emergency. This could also be a crisis that is linked to a Workplace Violence or a Crisis of Malevolence, and internally hacking a security or access code could be a dangerous crisis.

Financial Crisis: i.e. falling below the bottom line in revenue that allows for animal care. No institution wants to plan for falling below operational costs, but COVID19 placed a huge strain on many animal care facilities when they no longer had ticket sales and other visitor revenue, and still had enormous costs of feeding and caring for animals in care. A financial crisis can be mitigated, but there needs to be a specific plan ready to execute due to the time critical effects of a severe financial crisis. It is on this to file bankruptcy for a large company, but it is another to not be able to provide care to animals that are completely dependent on care.

### Risk Management

A Natural Crisis, or a disaster is a high risk, low frequency event, but as it has the ability to cascade the LA Zoo into further organizational crisis responses, it is critical to address a high risk/low frequency event, Appendix B, as thoroughly as any other event. While unlikely, a disaster style crisis has the potential to be detrimental.

In many organizational crisis that the LA Zoo faces, there are ways to monitor the community for any adverse opinions, monitor legislation and policy for any upcoming changes that may impact Zoo operations, and there may be ways to plan for and mitigate for other crisis responses to keep them small scale.

In California, natural crisis can be difficult to predict. We do not have the luxury of hurricane or tornado tracking that gives a few days notice. Weather monitoring can be valuable, but is only one factor in a wildfire. Earthquakes are impossible to predict with day-to-day accuracy. Recently, the LA Zoo had to close unexpectedly because a large tree fell on the property and was blocking walkway access. Not all Natural Emergencies are large scale, but all need to have a mitigation plan that is detailed and practiced.

### Signal Detecting

With careful attention to outside influences, and by understanding risk factors, the LA Zoo can predict negative impacts and remain proactive in most situations.

Confrontational Crisis i.e. Animal Rights Advocates negative attitudes on animal in captivity, leading towards negative public attitudes, lack of support, and lack of donors/ticket sales

Maintain a presence on social media, create a list of accounts who leave negative comments, monitor trending PETA and other organizations' hashtags, and get to know what are hot topics within the Animal Rights community. Watch what is happening at other large AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquarium) facilities and remain proactive on statements and comments.

Personal Crisis i.e. negative animal/human interaction leading to injuries or fatalities to humans or animals

Have a plan and keep it updated. This is a high risk/low frequency event. Careful engineering and infrastructure can help maintain a high level of safety for the majority of guests, but a crisis will happen outside of an average interaction. For example. in SeaWorld Parks, there have been fatalities that have happened after hours when a guest broke into the facility and attempted to interact with the large marine mammals. The guest was found face down in a pool in the morning. In Cincinnati, an endangered Gorilla was shot and killed when a toddler escaped his parent's watchful eye, and fell into the gorilla exhibit.

These examples show that while an organization can be prepared, emergencies happen and need to be planned and practiced for.

These can be difficult to predict the location or the timing, but if there are any dangerous social media trends, any opportunities that people may try to record and "go viral" should be monitored on Social Media platforms.

Organizational Crisis i.e. LA City officials making statements that contrast the LA Zoo Vision Statement, and appearing disconnected and unorganized to the public, leading to lack of support.

Maintaining a relationship and hosting collaborative briefings with the press and with stakeholders can help create a congruent message and help avoid conflicting attitudes. Often times when emotions run high, impulsive statements end up on record. By eliminating sources for high emotional and on the spot statements, the LA Zoo can remain in control of their messaging.

Personal Crisis i.e. animal emergency leading to injury, fatality or escape.

This is a very real possibility for the LA Zoo due to the age of their animals in care. Recently they have euthanized a beloved Orangutan and an Elephant; the LA Zoo has handled these well and with grace. They need to continue to have a plan and to make sure they keep animal care and public affairs carefully synched.

Making sure all staff are trained on what is confidential, and what is public knowledge are essential. If there are injured animals or planned ethnicizations, there should be a limited number of staff that knows. The more staff that knows sensitive information, the higher potential for a Personal Crisis to turn into an Organizational crisis.

Financial Crisis i.e. falling below the bottom line in revenue that allows for animal care.

Having a careful and conservative financial plan, as well as setting budgeting trigger points, and adjusting for rising costs of salaries for care employees and rising costs of animal care will help predict if the LA Zoo is moving towards a financial crisis. With a well developed and up to date budget and financial plan, there should not ever be a true crisis, and more long term planning.

Monitoring legislation changes in minimum wage salaries, legislation about taxes, registration for Exotic animals, avoiding malpractice or lawsuits and negative media coverage can help predict a shift in revenue, or a needed shift in financial planning.



## Response

### Messaging

Introduction: Name, and position, OR “on behalf of the LA Zoo” if a hired spokesperson or liaison.

Message: (what, when, impacts, what is happening now, what you can expect to happen, timeline)

Tone: Command based tone, but displaying empathy for the disruption, and attempting to alleviate panic.

Gratitude: for all involved that are assisting, gratitude for cooperation from the public.

Sources for more information: verbally list where information will be kept up to date and link websites into written messaging.

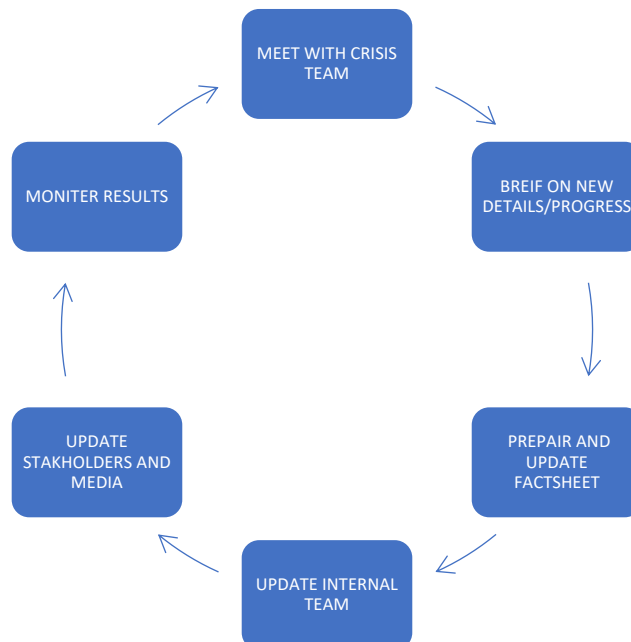
When arranging a press release with hosted media, have an American Sign Language Interpreter available on site if possible, at minimum, available virtual to interpret the press release to ASL.

When arranging spokesperson, if at all possible, hire a bilingual English/Spanish speaker who can deliver the press briefing. If not possible, have one person deliver in English, and another deliver in Spanish.

When delivering a written message, post in both English and Spanish.

Allow all website accessibility features.

### Information Cycle



The Information cycle will go through each division of the crisis communication team (Media Relations, Social Media and Interagency communications relations) and follow the above information cycle. The Communications Branch leader will host at minimum two meetings a day to stay current on information, receive input on media and social media monitoring from stakeholders, and prepare updated statements to be released.

Communication Channels

Internal

Internal communications will focus delivering similar messaging, but to specific high stakes audiences. These target groups include Employees and volunteers, the board of directors, Zoo members and Zoo donors. The LA Zoo relies on the support and generosity of members, donors, and the hard work from dedicated employees and volunteers. Keeping these audiences up dated with information-even if it is similar messaging will help keep emotions low, and trust high.

The number of individuals who will be receiving internal communications will be extremely high, so the messaging should not include anything that the LA Zoo has not already released publicly. The internal communications should have a focus on humanity, display higher notes of empathy, and should be person-first language. The majority of the internal communications will need to focus more on animal welfare than human welfare. While health and safety is the LA Zoos priority, our stakeholders assume that humans will take care of themselves, and will have a higher interest in the animal welfare.

<b>Internal Audience</b>	<b>Messaging Platform</b>	<b>Specific Information</b>	<b>Allow response?</b>
Employees		Lost hours, interruption of pay, what to do based on department	Yes, limited
Volunteers	Email	What the skillset needs are to remain operational	No-except linked survey form
Members	ZooScape newsletter	Details on who is being evacuated, and gratitude for the Emergency team working	no
Board of Directors	Email	Details on partners who are assisting, financial estimates, damages predictions	Yes, include public affairs phone number
Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)	Email	What the needs are, and gratitude. Can use technical and specific language.	Yes, limited

External Communications

The LA Zoo will rely heavily on external communications and their relationship with news media, as well as social media to deliver their messaging. Due to the fast pace nature of a disaster like a wildfire threatening the Zoo property, there may not be a feasible way to provide internal communications separately from external communications.

Social Media Platforms

Platform	URL	Username	Password	Authorized users
Zoo Website	Lazoo.org	LAZooAdmin	WhoLettheDogsout?	IT Department, PR Crisis team
LA Zoo Facebook	LA Zoo	LAZooAdmin	DontBLion1	PR and Communications crisis team- Social Media team
LAZoo Instagram	@lazoo	LAZooAdmin	DontBLion2	PR and Communications crisis team- Social Media team
LA Zoo Twitter	@lazoo	LAZooAdmin	DontBLion3	PR and Communications crisis team- Social Media team

With social media posting, ensure to tag and cross reference the first responders, the fire name, and AZA

News Media

Channel	Platform	Contact name	Contact phone number
ABC channel 7	TV news	Scott Webber	(555) 626-2345
Telemundo	TV news	Manny Ramirez	(555) 626-3456
NBC channel 4	TV news	Dana Dirkes	(555) 626- 4567
Fox channel 11	TV news	David Gonzolez	(555) 626-5678
KTLA channel 5	TV news	Patty Luna	(555) 626-6789
LA Times	Print/online newspaper	Jessica Thomas	<a href="mailto:j.t.fire@latimes.com">j.t.fire@latimes.com</a>
ZooPals	Podcast	Jim McGrath	(555) 626-9101

## Example Press Statement

This statement is designed to briefly address the public in a: what, when, and who is impacted style statement. This statement is suitable to be delivered in a media press briefing, a statement on the LA Zoo webpage and across social media channels. It is crucial when information updates become available that the LA Zoo makes a timely statement across all communication distribution channels.

*There is a confirmed Brush fire in Griffith Park that has prompted mandatory evacuations for the LA Zoo. Firefighters are on scene and taking action, but for the safety of the members, guests, staff and animals at the LA Zoo, we will be closed until further notice, and initiating shelter in place and evacuation procedures.*

*Our Animal Care staff is dedicated to the safety and wellbeing to every animal within our care, the LA Zoo maintains a year-round heightened state of Fire preparedness, and plans to shelter the majority of animals in place. Vulnerable species are being transported to temporary facilities, and veterinarians are closely monitoring all LA Zoo residents. We thank everyone for their cooperation, and thank the first responders who dedicate their lives for our safety.*

*Updates to fire conditions and evacuations can be found here: <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents>*

*Updates for the LA Zoo will be posed on our website, Facebook, Instagram accounts, all webcams have been temporarily disabled. <https://lazoo.org/>*

*Make sure YOU are ready if you need to evacuate with your pets. <https://www.spcai.org/take-action/emergency-preparedness/evacuation-how-to-be-pet-prepared>*

## Media Question and Answer

The following Example questions were prepared after conducting an emergency preparedness drill. These were the most asked questions, and the most followed topics. LA Zoo Media Spokes people should be trained, briefed and prepared to face confrontational questions about the LA Zoo's shelter in place policy, and should have clear understanding on where the public can receive up to date information on the fire suppression progress.

**Q: Do you know what caused this fire? Was it related to the new construction that the Zoo is doing?**

A: The cause of the fire is under investigation, and unknown. The fire was not reported by Zoo staff and is not on Zoo property.

**Why aren't you choosing to evacuate all the animals? What makes an animal "vulnerable" aren't they all?**

A: The LA Zoo has a comprehensive fire preparedness plan and has been designed since day 1 to withstand a fire event that threatens the zoo. We work closely with CalFire and Local firefighters to maintain brush clearance, have wide walkways that will not allow fire to travel, and do not

have combustible structures that overhang animal enclosures. All our Zoo resident animals have an indoor or semi enclosed “sleeping quarters” that was designed to be an emergency shelter. All animals in captivity are vulnerable, absolutely. Just like people, some are more sensitive to air quality impacts that we are expecting over the next few days.

**When are you going to “cut the locks” and just let them save themselves?**

A: That can be an extremely useful tactic with farm or ranch animals, but releasing thousands of exotic animals in the heart of Los Angeles during an emergency is extremely dangerous for the animals and any people that they encounter. That is not in the LA Zoo’s plan.

**Are any of your animal care staff going to stay and fight the fire?**

A: The AZA has a partnership with an emergency response team. Many members are here on site already, and have more advance emergency training, as well as having clear communications with other emergency responders. We are thankful for the rapid response, and grateful for their dedication to our animal care. Many of our LA Zoo employees and volunteers are a part of the AZA emergency response team.

**We know that high levels of smoke are dangerous for populations of people, can you talk about what kind of tolerances the animals have, and what you think is acceptable?**

A: There are some species, like our avian species who are more susceptible to stress from smoke inhalation, and they will be in fully indoor enclosures, or will be evacuated to clean air at a partner facility. Many of our Zoo residents live in natural environments that are susceptible to wildfires as well, so are adapted like we are to be able to handle a small amount of smoke. We will continue to monitor air quality, and assure we are keeping everyone, staff and residents alike as far removed from smoke as possible.

**What does stress management look like in animal care? Emergencies are not good for any of us, but we at least know what is going on, and have control over the situation, how are you going to manage the noise, heat, flames or commotion?**

A: Stress management is a huge consideration in our emergency plan. Like many of us, our Zoo residents thrive with consistency and patterns. One of the many reasons that we prioritize shelter in place rather than evacuations is to limit the stress exposure. As we are closed, we are doing everything we can in our power to maintain as much consistency as we can while functioning on an emergency only staff. The residents will be happy when the Zoo gates are open again, and the members and guests return!

**Do you have a hospital here on site, and are you going to keep staff members here? Are you requiring them to stay and work in such dangerous conditions? What are they able to treat if they need to?**

None of our staff are required to stay on site, the AZA has a network of volunteers who are training for situations like this, and willing to serve in emergencies like this. Many of them are

on their way here now, and we do have quite a few LA Zoo employees and volunteers on that team who are choosing to stay and work.

We do have a small animal hospital, and are able to house animals inside on clean, circulated air, as well as provide emergency surgeries, treat injuries, and provide respiratory therapy if needed. We will have a Veterinarian and Vet Techs on site who are part of the AZA emergency response team. We are grateful for their service and dedication to our residents in our care.

**What is the trigger point for your staff to leave? Are there firefighters who know how to keep animals safe? What partnerships do you have with local firefighters?**

We have a great partnership with our local LA City as well as State firefighters. We work together each year to review and refresh our designated fire preparedness and suppression plan. Our local firefighters are up to date on all the fire protection lines that are on Zoo grounds, and we have already initiated our emergency fire sprinklers at their advice.

The LA Zoo was designed to always have an exit that is safe from fire. Fires can only burn where there is combustible material, and the parking area, front entrance of the Zoo, and adjoining roadways leading to the interstate have limited or no vegetation for that reason. Nobody will ever become “trapped.”

**How many days can you go if resupply trucks can’t come in? Will you ever feed some animals to another and let the food chain just happen like it would in a real fire?**

A: In prior years, we have not had an issue with resupply. The way the park is oriented, and where all the combustible materials are away from the freeway and any loading docks and refrigeration units. While we may be closed to the public for a duration, the freeways will remain open. We do not foresee a long-term delay in food or other critical supply for our resident animals and the critical staff who will remain working.

**Do you have holding areas, or area that the firefighters refer to as “safety zones” that you plan to move animals and staff into if this fire doesn’t back down?**

A: Yes! We do, and we are here standing in it. Our parking lot area is designated as a Safety Zone that we will evacuate animals to for a short-term duration if need be. This area is also designated and available for Firefighters to use as a safety zone. We appreciate the cooperation from the public and the media keeping this area clear.

## Revision

### Evaluation

The most effective time to evaluate a crisis response and prepare for next time is immediately following a crisis or disaster response. As all communication is by people and for people, the key communication points, how they were delivered, who they were delivered to, and what the reactions were should be the forefront of the communications plan evaluation.

An effective structure for a post incident evaluation is an After Action Review (AAR), Appendix C, a structured conversation that focused on what happened, who was involved, and key learning points. A well facilitated AAR will focus on problems and solutions rather than pointing blame on people or a process.

In addition to the crisis response leadership team having an evaluation, the following short survey should be delivered and returned from each member of the crisis team, regardless of their roll. This will help the leadership team gain insights about details while they were focused on large issues.

<p><u>LA Zoo Disaster Response Evaluation</u></p> <p>Department:</p> <p>Roll:</p> <p>Name (optional)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What were your needs that we can help solve to set the next person in your roll up for success?</li><li>• What were your concerns?</li><li>• Did your leadership team support you?</li><li>• Were you able to communicate your needs as they came up?</li><li>• Did you have adequate training to perform in your roll?</li><li>• Will you volunteer to be in this role again? Why/Why not?</li><li>• Would you like to have a one-on-one meeting to discuss your concerns?</li></ul>
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After reviewing the survey results for team members, the crisis communication and leadership team can use those results and any further conversations to create revisions, changes, and adaptations to the existing crisis plan. If conversations from the AAR and survey results imply that there was ambiguity, a more concrete action plan should be immediately drafted.

Ongoing communications to internal and external audiences are crucial as the LA Zoo prepares to reopen, and invite the full staff and guests back to the Zoo. No person reacts to trauma the same way, and the crisis communication branch should remain fully staffed to monitor social media, phone lines, and media stories. The Communications team should remain ready to act if a smaller organizational crisis like an adverse opinion group makes attacking statements, or if social media is trending on a story that does not align with Zoo messaging.

## Monitoring

In an after-crisis evaluation, the communications team should outreach to all of the internal and external stakeholders listed above, and ask for their feelings on the crisis event. Was there understanding? Were the Zoo's key messages understood? What emotions were people feeling? Where were people learning about crisis updates?

Those outreaches will be used to craft further messaging, and to evaluate platforms that were used for messaging. If stakeholders had emotional responses that were not predicted, evaluate further. What news media messages were being broadcast? Were there messages not being improperly delivered?

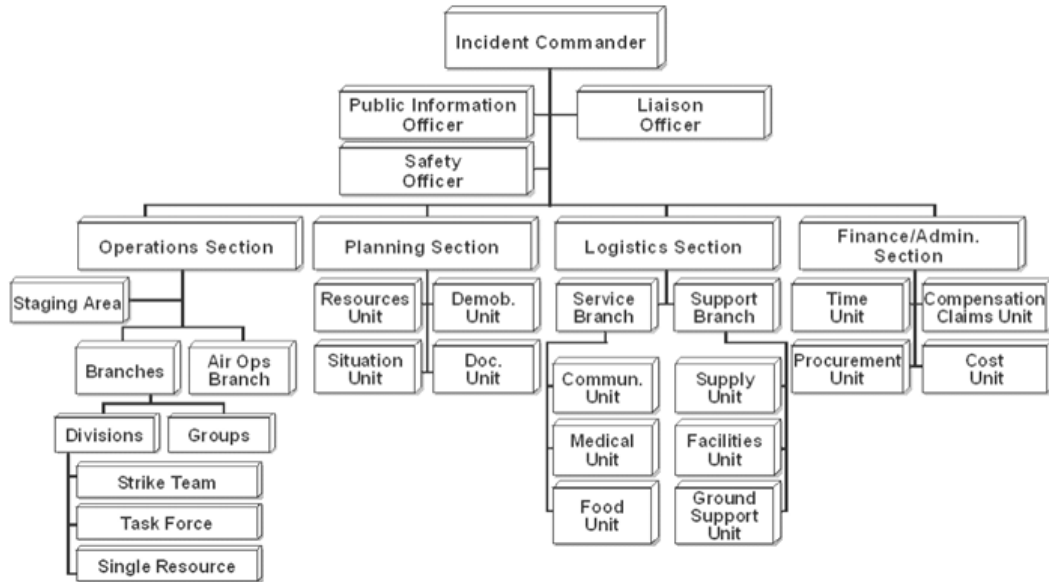
What did social media and website traffic look like compared to operational days? Was one platform relied on or interacted with at a higher frequency? Is there a platform that needs to be utilized? Have the Social Media team search on social media platforms where the LA Zoo does NOT have an account, and search for trends and traffic.

## Litigation and Mitigation

Was the cause of this disaster determined, and was it avoidable? Were there damages that the Zoo can charge if a party is found at fault? Document damages, keep records separate, and have the legal team address all employees, volunteers and external contractors (if any) what kind of damages documentation needs to be on file.



**ICS Organizational Structure and Elements**



Appendix B

Risk Management Matrix

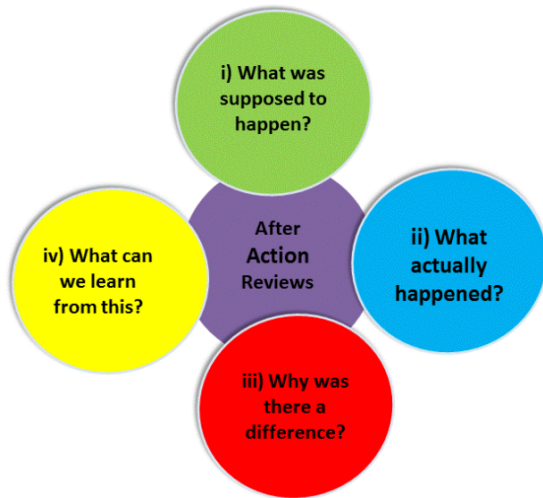
		PROBABILITY (Expected Frequency)				
		FREQUENT	LIKELY	OCCASIONAL	SELDOM	UNLIKELY
SEVERITY (Expected Consequence)		A	B	C	D	E
CATASTOPHIC	I	EH	EH	H	H	M
CRITICAL	II	EH	H	H	M	L
MODERATE	III	H	M	M	L	L
NEGLECTIBLE	IV	M	L	L	L	L

LEGEND: EH = extremely high risk, H = high risk, M = medium/moderate risk, L = low risk

Appendix C

After Action Review, US Military Combined Arms Center, 2013

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/wfldp/docs/army-leaders-guide-to-aar.pdf>



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