

Issues Management Plan

Purpose:

This plan outlines procedures for collecting and conveying information to internal and external audiences during or immediately following a major news story for which we have university experts that can provide factual information. The news story is such that an issues management team may need to be formed to address questions from both internal and external stakeholders. Issues management teams are particularly important when NC State University*** experts need to take an active role in ensuring that factual information is provided to stakeholder groups and partners to equip them to more knowledgeably deal with specific issues.

Issues:

An issue or controversy is defined as an occurrence that prompts significant, often sustained, news coverage and public scrutiny. Examples of issues management that NC Cooperative Extension personnel might be involved in would likely deal with risk to public health or North Carolina economy when it comes to animals, produce, dietary substance, or the environment. For example, salmonella outbreak on tomatoes, E.coli outbreak on spinach, mad cow disease, are all examples where the university will form issues management teams.

The Department of Communication Services in conjunction with Department Extension Leaders and Extension Program Leaders will brainstorm possible “issues” that may arise in the news, identify

appropriate issues management team members, identify available NCCE experts to talk with the news media about the issue and develop action plan based on the following steps. Teams may consist of members from several departments. At least one member from the Department of Communication Services will participate on every team to facilitate and help implement both internal and external communications plans with employees, media and others.

Team Members:

Fresh Produce Safety – Salmonella and Tomatoes (example)

Issues Management Team: Ben Chapman*, Department of 4-H Youth Development and Family and Consumer Sciences; Diane Ducharme*, Center for Value-Added & Alternative Agriculture; Chris Gunter*, Department of Horticultural Science; Trevor Phister*, Department of Food, Bioprocessing and Nutrition Sciences*; Ed Estes, Department of Agricultural Resources and Economics; Keith Baldwin, NC A&T State University; Leah Chester-Davis, Center for Value Added & Alternative Agriculture & Department of Communication Services; Natalie Hampton, Department of Communication Services.**

* Members of Fresh Produce Safety Task Force

** Back up for anyone in Communications Services (including Leah) is someone on writing team.

Issues Management Response

1. Employee on issues management team first learning of outbreak should initiate e-mail or conference call to other team members.
2. Material for a Hot Topic Update is pulled from files and team members add updated info, if necessary, most likely from current FDA Web site.
3. Leah or Natalie notifies University News Services about available experts and help craft Media Advisory for UNS to distribute to news media. The Media Advisory is posted to Online News Rooms on Value-Added Web site, Fresh Produce Safety Web site, Department of Communication Services Web site.
4. Hot Topic Update is sent by Communications representative on Issues Management team to Ed Jones and Vicki Pettit, with request to Vicki Pettit to distribute to entire organization. If Vicki is not available, Communications representative sends the material to Helen Crane to distribute. (Note: the Hot Topic Update may mention that a Media Advisory has been sent to news media but the Media Advisory will not be distributed other than by University News Services.)
Web sites may want to direct agents to the Intranet. For example, the Value-Added and Fresh Produce Safety Web sites will direct agents to the Hot Topic Update on the Intranet if it's a fresh produce issue.
5. Hot Topic Update information may need to be adapted to send to external audiences such as growers, task force members, associations and others. Issues management team members will adapt as needed; Communication Services representative on team (Leah and/or Natalie) will edit before distribution. Designated member of Issues Management Team will send to external contacts. Note: we request that the letterhead for Hot Topic Updates be used when providing information to both internal and external groups as it clearly identifies that the information is being provided by NC State University/NC Cooperative Extension and positions NCSU/NCCE as providers of research-based information. The external Hot Topic Update will be part of the featured content on www.ces.ncsu.edu. Other web sites may link to it.
6. Issues Management Team will determine when and how often to provide updates to organization and to University News Services.
7. Subject matter specialists and associates will serve as experts. The Hot Topic Update information has been provided so that agents can respond to media calls. Reporters may either call the expert directly or go through Communication Services (this includes Leah, part of CS and also member of Value-Added team) or University News Services to reach the expert.
8. At beginning of dealing with a controversy in the news media, the communications representative on the Issues Management team will remind team members to make sure they follow step 10 below.
9. Each person fielding a call will record name of reporter, media outlet, date and nature of request. This information will be sent via e-mail to Ramona Herring in the Department of Communication Services, ramona_herring@ncsu.edu to compile for reports to administration, Fresh Produce Safety Task Force and others. Ramona will send to the communication rep(s) on team so they can share with team members and others as needed.
10. Issues Management team via e-mail or conference call will share lessons learned and what might be done to improve response.

