



Chapter 3

Managing the Crisis Situation

Maribeth Anderson
Joe Gollehon
Charles Ryan Associates
Charleston, West Virginia

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§ 3.01. Introduction.

In 2006 the country witnessed how quickly tragedy can strike in the coal industry,¹ and the industry learned how important a controlled, coordinated public response is to mitigating miscommunication that often accompanies chaotic events. From the Union Carbide leak at Bhopal in 1984,² to the Virginia Tech Massacre in 2007,³ a study of public responses to crises will lead to the discovery of consistent strategies that work.

A description of the current media environment illustrates why the flow of information is so difficult to control. Keeping that in mind, principals of crisis communications can steer an organization around some explosive situations.

§ 3.02. The Rise in Citizen Journalism.

Certainly the media landscape has been changing for 50 years, and is changing now more rapidly than ever before. We have, in the last five years, moved away from a system where a dozen networks controlled public consumption to a time now where anybody can make anything widely available. The synergy of consumer trends is responsible: the cell phone camera, YouTube.⁴

¹ On January 2, 2006, 13 miners were trapped during a mine explosion at the International Coal Group's Sago mine near Buckhannon in Upshur County, West Virginia. Seventeen days later on January 19, 2006, two miners were killed during an evacuation due to a belt line fire at the Aracoma Alma mine in Logan, West Virginia operated by Massey Energy subsidiary Aracoma Coal Company. Four months later on May 20, 2006 in Harlan County, Kentucky, five miners were killed at an underground explosion at a mine operated by Kentucky Darby, LLC.

² Shortly after midnight on December 3, 1984 methyl isocyanate (MIC) leaked from a tank at a Union Carbide Corporation subsidiary pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, killing approximately 3,800 people and rendering several thousand other individuals with permanent or partial disabilities.

³ A school shooting with two separate attacks on April 16, 2007, resulted in a single assailant killing 32 and wounding many more before committing suicide. It was the deadliest school shooting in U. S. history.

⁴ YouTube is a video sharing website which allows users to upload, view, and share video clips. YouTube was founded in 2005. Google purchase YouTube in 2006.