

WILDFIRE EMERGENCY: COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES

Destination Canada has prepared this overview to help destination partners prepare for climate disasters like wildfires, excess smoke, floods and extreme heat or cold in their regions.



“Always on” environmental scan.

Using your networks, be aware of what information, and perhaps misinformation, is out there about your destination as it relates to brewing issues or crisis. Check-in with your in-market reps and in-market collaborators to stay abreast of what is being communicated globally- often where a crisis is blown out of proportion with a lack of understanding of local geography and resources. Keep communicating with Destination Canada and your PTMOs to ensure all have up to date information and are sharing when appropriate.



Build your network before you need it (map your collaborators).

Keep an updated list of those responsible for emergency responses in your region. With your team, discuss who are the key (and trusted) collaborators who need to be informed of visitors’ needs during a crisis. Who are your trusted sources – as it relates to access, emergency response and potential travel advisories to your region? Which tourism operators could be most impacted or can provide the most support during a critical time of need?

(TIP: During an emergency, use data-based services such as text messaging, social media or email to gather and communicate information. Data-based services are less likely to experience major interruptions when phone lines are down.)



Proactive Communications.

Plan ahead, and draft potential communications in response to climate crises like wildfires, including sample questions and answers. By working through draft questions and answers early, you will identify additional information that may need to be prepared and updated. This bank of communications content can be updated quickly and shared across communications channels (media, website, social media, collaborators/industry) during an emergency. Sharing it early with PTMO partners and Destination Canada can also flag important gaps in information.

(Tip: Prepare a stand-alone website or web pages- also known as a dark site- that you have ready (but don't publish or promote) in anticipation of a crisis or emergency. It can include critical links to local emergency response sites and easily updated with the latest travel info when published.)



Consistent messaging is critical.

During times of stress and uncertainty, it is important to share accurate and reliable information from trusted sources, such as official government agencies or reputable news organizations. Avoid sharing unverified information or rumors. Also, follow the social media accounts of local emergency management agencies, fire departments, and other public safety agencies to receive official updates and instructions, which then can also be shared across your platforms.

It is important to monitor news and social media for mis information. If misinformation is out there, inform Destination Canada, who can assist in ensuring it is corrected quickly before it spreads nationally and globally. Also, when media can’t get through to those responsible for emergency response, they often will call PTMOs. Always refer media enquiries to the experts, don’t speculate on causes or impacts, and continue to share important messages relevant for your visitors, including directing them to your website and social channels for up-to-date information regarding visitation across the impacted areas.

(Tip: Follow, use and share relevant hashtags related to the wildfire, such as the name of the fire or the location. This will help your team and your visitors stay informed about the latest developments and connect with others who are also impacted.)

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDED PROTOCOLS

STEP
A

Update Crisis Risk Register

- Update your register to identify most probable scenarios for your region
- Identify contingency plans

STEP
B

Local Emergency Response Management Organizations

- Get to know who will make decisions during a crisis and how they will collaborate with you regarding the needs of visitors
- Participate in crisis training exercises

STEP
C

Update Crisis Communication Toolkit

- Create or update crisis communication toolkit including contact lists (staff, key collaborators and industry lists including transportation partners, emergency responders, travel trade key contacts)
- Development of risk register and development of key messages

STEP
D

Work With Key Tourism Operators

- Should operators be encouraged to plan for crises support from the DMO at critical times
- If you have a conference centre, ensure their crisis communications plan is up to date
- Plan with accommodation/transportation operators on how to help stranded visitors in an emergency
- Plan how to communicate with visitors during a crisis (non-English speaking also) including encouraging visitors to sign up for provincial and national alert systems

STEP
E

Consider Communication Methods

- Plan how to communicate with staff, key collaborators and visitors if electricity and phone lines go down
- Outline acute response messaging for potential crises by communication channel
- Prepare visitors before they arrive on the tools available to them, should a climate crisis occur while visiting. (<https://www.alertready.ca/>)

STEP
F

Practice How to Manage a Crisis

- Train staff re crisis roles and responsibilities
- Undertake regular DMO crisis training exercises
- Annual media training for key spokespeople

STEP
G

Following A Crisis – Always Take Time to Review

- Identify what worked well and where there were gaps
- Identify need areas included resources and training
- Share best practices and learners with Team Canada
- Determine recovery strategy and proactive communications for the return of visitors