

POST-INCIDENT COMMUNICATION RESPONSE

In March, a heart-wrenching tragedy in a guided group captured the spotlight. For those of us who were not directly involved, it was a difficult piece of news as it represented the greatest fear for all who take responsibility over the welfare of others. For those who were involved, there are still levels of trauma and suffering that only they can truly understand.

When the incident occurred, President Marc Ledwidge sent a short note on the Informalex to the membership alerting members that a fatality had taken place. Details were few and this spurred some questions from some members regarding our policy around post-incident response.

There is an intense push-pull after an incident such as this. How much do we disclose and to whom do we disclose it? Members want to know out of concern, interest and potential learning. The public often wants to hear a statement from the relevant governing body. Sometimes if you don't put the real story out there, someone else will put theirs and it may well be more damaging in the short term. Our lawyers and insurance are concerned that the wrong information may lead to an increased chance for a lawsuit. The people involved sometimes want to share the details of the event – sometimes not. Deciding what to do can be as complex as navigating a group through an unknown, wild icefield in a -30 whiteout. Traps lie everywhere.

Typically, after a serious incident, our liability lawyer hires a professional to do an on-site investigation. This means that the information collected is privileged and subject to release as the lawyer sees fit. The ACMG may release information but only after discussion with the lawyer and the people involved in the incident. In the most recent situation, I chose to honour the wishes of the people most affected and have not, to date, released anything significant. People in traumatic emotional states may be concerned about being judged and this is the last thing they need at this time. For me, the well-being of the guides involved trumped the “need to know” by anyone else.

Depending on the situation, public media may jump on these stories. They are often looking to create a story by finding blame and it requires training to manage these encounters. **Although they may come across as your pals, they are interested in nothing more than a byline. This is why I ask that all media inquiries be referred to me or President Marc Ledwidge.** It's the best way to ensure that a story goes the way that works best for the association and its members.

