

CHAPTER VI

EMERGENCY PREPARATIONS AND POST-DISASTER RELAUNCHING

Introduction

Tourists and tourism destinations are economically, culturally and industrially diverse. Some of the things that are common to them all, however, are day-to-day expectations of a safe, predictable and supportive tourism industry. The resorts and recreation sites that draw tourism depend on both human resources and technology. These two sets of assets must survive not only the routine wear and tear of normal operations, but also the calamities of natural disasters.

Other chapters have discussed the features of natural disasters and the means to build for survival. This chapter presents information on what to do before, during and after a disaster to ensure that resort operations are maintained or are brought back into service as quickly as possible. In a highly competitive market, the local tourism sector can remain competitive under even the most extreme conditions. Managing the event and public perceptions of it is the key to remaining competitive and relaunching the local tourism industry.

In the case of predictable disasters such as tropical storms in the Caribbean or flooding on the Indian subcontinent, there are routine procedures that can be taken to protect both the infrastructure and the market share of local tourism. The resort that disregards routine preparations, annual training and regular updating of emergency procedure manuals places its viability at grave risk. Lengthy and detailed manuals and guidebooks are available on how to plan for emergencies. Listed in the reference section of this chapter, they focus on coordination with local and regional governments, which often have detailed prepared plans on dealing with disasters. The suggestions and tools provided in this chapter draw on experience with earthquakes in Greece and Japan, tropical storms in Mauritius and China, floods in Wales and the United States and emergency action in Sweden, Israel and Argentina.

Regardless of where a resort is located, when disaster strikes, people must act. If proper planning and training have not been done, steps can still be taken to minimize damage and ensure the protection of the resort, its clients and its staff. Likewise, the local tourism industry that has not developed a marketing strategy for use in the wake of a disaster can still apply sound marketing principles to assist relaunching their tourism. This chapter provides the bare outlines of what to do when confronted with an impending disaster or an unexpected one. The first section provides guidance on emergency precautions resorts and businesses can take. Useful tools for disasters are provided in Appendices A, B and C. The second section deals with recovery and relaunching tourism immediately after the disaster subsides. Marketing and press relations tools are provided in Appendices D and E.

Preparations for a Disaster

Physical Plant Preparations

Regardless of how well designed and built the physical plant of a resort or business, the destructive power of tropical storms, floods and earthquakes cannot be overestimated. This is especially true for those elements of the resort that were never intended to be exposed to such physical abuse — elements such as outdoor leisure equipment, ornaments and decorations, and electronic equipment. Modelled on the approach used in Trou d'Eau Douce, Mauritius, Appendices A, B and C provide checklists that can be used to ensure attention is given to buildings, grounds and equipment before tropical storms and floods.

Key personnel with responsibility for various activities and equipment at a resort should be notified as soon as possible that they will be needed to secure the physical plant. The staff can then refamiliarize itself with emergency procedures and steps necessary to prepare or secure equipment, buildings and important records. They can ensure that emergency equipment and supplies are on hand.

Employee coordination and family preparations

The most important resource of a resort or business is its employees. Because they have homes just as likely to be affected as the resorts and businesses, and have families that are at the top of their priority list, industry managers must give attention to providing guidance and assistance to the staff, especially those who will be needed during the impending disaster. Appendices A, B and C include emergency planning checklists for employee families. These can be copied and should be distributed as early as possible.

Resort management will also want to assess which staff it will need and ensure they are aware of that need. These “critical employees” should be given the opportunity to deal with preparations for their families, and if shelters will be needed, management should examine whether they can assist their employees’ families, if in no other manner than through providing transport to government shelters.

Protecting and assisting guests and visitors

Guests in residence expect resort managers to know the local risks and look to them for guidance on what to do when a disaster is imminent or has recently occurred. Appendices A, B and C also offer checklists that resort managers can provide to their guests. A generic version of forms used around the world, they offer practical instruction to guests confronted by storms, floods and earthquakes. Resort managers are encouraged to include the earthquake checklist for tourists among other routine materials as part of in-room information packs. The checklists for tropical storms and floods should be copied and distributed whenever it becomes clear that some form of event is likely to occur.

Disaster relief programs in Israel and England have provided hard won lessons on steps that can be taken to assist local authorities seeking information on the welfare of foreign or out-of-town visitors. (Wyllie, 1994; Ben Hador, 1994) Resorts and hotels should pay special attention to maintaining a list of guests and, when possible, their travel departure plans. When a predictable disaster is expected to arise, tourism managers should be able to inform local

government authorities who is in residence, who has departed and where those visitors intended to go. These records are particularly valuable for foreign nationals whose families will attempt to make contact. And this information is of critical value when resorts need to project their preparedness and stability to the tourism market seeking to be reassured.

Guests expected to arrive during or immediately after a predicted disaster are extremely important to the resort. They will gauge the professionalism of the resort by whether they have been given good advice and early warning. The local tourism industry, the local government, and the corporate owners of large resorts and recreational businesses can provide easy assistance to expected guests through a telephone hotline or free call-in telephone number, as discussed below. The resort itself has an additional responsibility to be prepared for questions from guests expected to arrive during or after the onset of a disaster. Information on the status of the hotel and transport facilities should be written and used by the reservations staff and those who handle incoming telephone calls to the hotel or resort. As described in the section on relaunching tourism, these should be updated as appropriate and should be honest yet positive.

Travel Assistance and Transport Coordination

Tourism destinations are dependent on the travel and transport infrastructure. Local and regional governments are responsible for maintaining transport facilities and providing information on the status of roads, bridges, rail and airport facilities. The status of commercial airlines, buses and trains, however, falls to those businesses themselves. Tourist will look to resort managers for information on the status of these services. The resorts and hotels that can provide valuable information on transportation, or other travel assistance, will send a strong message to guests that they are safe, cared for and respected. Everyone involved will recognize that disasters mean that normal operations will be compromised. Resort managers who can keep their guests informed and provide assistance whenever possible will find the guests expressing confidence in the resort and the travel destination.

Communications

Disasters always increase concerns among the families of the travelling public. Further, internal communications within the resort and the resort community can be devastated as well. This lack of communication can be the single greatest source of upset among guests and managers alike. Resort managers can take precautions before the onset of predictable disasters by coordinating with local governments. Knowing how emergency communications will be handled will allow the resort to integrate its own activities with those of others in an effective manner. Large resorts may even have sophisticated communications equipment that will be needed by local government officials.

Internal resort communications should be as sophisticated as the resort itself. Large facilities may need to invest in battery-operated devices that communicate to a central unit at the resort. Small facilities may only need a system where staff check in with a centralized manager on a routine basis. In cases where electronic communications devices are in limited supply, they should first go to critical employees dealing with emergencies or critical engineering and safety equipment.

A major communications need is to keep guests and employees up to date. Facilities with in-house television or speaker announcing systems should use these to make routine updates on the status of the disaster and the resort's response. When power is lost, however, simple bulletin boards, such as those used in large resorts in Mauritius, are extremely effective in keeping guests and staff informed (Morris, 1994). These simple devices can provide information on the storm, the status of tour group plans, travel and evacuation conditions and how to contact friends or family at the resort or in distant homes.

When all else breaks down, resort managers should be prepared with messengers, who can move between buildings, or to government centres, with information on medical emergencies, fires, utility outages and related immediate needs.

Emergency shelter coordination

Large resorts can be expected to serve as emergency shelters when disasters of immense proportion arise. Those buildings made to withstand calamities are more than cost-effective investments by the resort owners. They serve as resources to local governments who may not have municipal resources of equal quality. Experiences in Belarus and Taiwan (Province of China) indicate that when conditions are particularly severe, resorts, hotels and tourism facilities such as museums and exhibition halls may be pressed into service (Gerasimenko, 1994; Ting-Kuei and Fang-Bin, 1994). Managers should be prepared to assist local governments in these crises.

Even when conditions are not severe enough to require evacuation or shelter, resort managers may wish to designate areas within their buildings that are lower in risk. These would include interior rooms for tropical storms, rooms above flood level and structurally sound accommodation after earthquakes.

Shelter management requires significant logistical planning. Food, sanitary facilities, blankets and space must be identified and prepared. Appendices A and B provide checklist sections based on experience from Australia, the United States and Canada that can help organize these preparations, (Heath, 1994; Moore, 1994; MacFarlane, 1994).

Any resort or hotel that will not be able to offer shelter should inform guests where shelter can be found. This information should be broadly distributed and posted prominently. Guests should be apprised of when local governments order evacuations and should be given assistance to comply. Similar assistance should be provided to employee families. Checklist sections on evacuations are provided in Appendices A, B and C, and are based on experience gained in England, China and Argentina, (Norris, 1994; Yuanpeng, 1994).

Security

Disasters can lead to a breakdown in civil law and order. They can also expose the grounds of a resort to the depredations of criminals causing a serious liability risk. Resort managers have viewed security as a service to their guests and employees. In essence, it is a police function that may have to be carried out by the resort. The Canadian emergency site management system provides for direct police participation in disaster management and is a model approach that resorts may wish to use (MacFarlane, 1994). Facilities with limited staff will want to remain in close communication with police and fire

departments, as these government units will provide relief from criminals as well as chemical spills and fires. Larger facilities may have the resources to mount their own security efforts. These should still be coordinated with the police, and should be placed on alert before expected disasters.

Resort managers should be prepared to cordon off dangerous sections of their grounds or buildings and blockade access to sections that will not be used, but would provide an opportunity for mischief.

Coordination among industry members to support marketing objectives. Tourism is a competitive business and marketing any particular destination is an ongoing responsibility often shared by the local and state tourism industry. Experience from Greece, Turkey and Israel indicates that a strong marketing effort and appropriate advertising will be important in relaunching the tourism industry in an affected area. (Bar-On and Paz-Tal, 1994). Whenever possible, preparations for these kinds of efforts should be in place before a predictable disaster arises. Even in the event of an unpredicted calamity, the largest and most sophisticated resorts, their parent corporations, and the local and state governments should have some basic preparations available for immediate use. The basic goal is to ensure the long-term confidence of the travelling public in the local industry. If this can be maintained, then tourism in the area will be able to maintain its competitiveness with similar destinations. The key, in addition to a sound marketing strategy, is good press relations.

While marketing tourism destinations is a well-understood activity, the essence of this responsibility changes in the face of a disaster and its aftermath. A lengthy and detailed approach to marketing after disasters is presented in a guidebook by Sonmez *et al* (1994). This guide contains key elements that can be used by resorts, the local industry and the regional or state tourism ministry. It provides a detailed approach that would be most effective in highly developed nations. The five principal concepts, however, are useful everywhere.

As a standing effort, handled well before a disaster arises, the local industry, parent corporations (if any) and tourism ministries should establish an integrated work group to implement these five protective concepts. They should develop a marketing and advertising campaign for print and broadcast media to assist recovery efforts. They should develop advertising strategies appropriate to specific calamities that will signal the start of the relaunching effort. The industry should be prepared to work with the news media and local authorities responsible for press relations. In so doing, they can ensure the marketing message is accurate, effective and properly coupled with other messages being given out by local officials. Fourth, the industry should focus as much positive attention as possible on the destination. Finally, they should inform future visitors of the anticipated recovery period and enhancements expected because of the recovery effort.

These concepts are not done well in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Resort managers and local tourism industry leaders should take steps to prepare themselves for a relaunching effort before the beginning of the storm or flood seasons, and on a regular basis in areas subject to earthquakes. That said, if nothing has been done, any kind of marketing and media cooperation will pay handsome rewards. The next five sections provide an

introduction to the marketing and media-relations challenge facing resort managers and local tourism industry leaders.

Critical pre-disaster marketing actions

Three basic marketing actions are best accomplished no later than during any warning period available before a disaster, and preferably as a routine function before the main tourism season. If local resorts and government ministries have an integrating work group, that body would take on these actions.

First, the local industry should determine what attracts visitors, what makes them want to return and what makes the locale competitive with other destinations. It is also important to know how visitors found out about the destination and what publications they read. This information can be developed through standard market research and may already be available to some of the large resorts or their parent corporations. If this kind of information is not available, interviews with visitors (even immediately before a storm) can provide some of these data.

Second, resort managers, or the industry work group, should maintain a list of advertising outlets for both print and broadcast media that visitors read or view. Contact names, telephone numbers and placement cost information will allow rapid selection of advertising outlets most likely to have a large and positive impact on potential visitors. Research suggests that print media is perceived as more credible than broadcast advertising, and thus should be given emphasis.

Finally, resort managers should launch their advertising campaign as soon as possible and appropriate after the disaster. The news media will direct potential visitors' attention to the destination. Timely advertising that sends a message about the disaster and the locale's resilience will have a higher impact at this time.

Advertising preparations

Advertising is a routine effort within the industry, but is not done overnight. Thus, resorts or industry work groups may want to prepare some materials for use only in the event of a disaster. For example, Caribbean resorts and industry councils have stock advertising copy that needs only minor alterations to become an effective relaunching tool. Resort managers who do not have existing advertising copy may find the following basic rules of assistance:

- (a) Have a simple theme, make layouts simple and illustrate the distinctive element of the destination that makes tourists want to visit and to return.
- (b) Offer a clear and simple headline which describes the benefits of traveling to the destination.
- (c) Use an illustration to attract readers and to tell a story that reinforces the main sales point of the ad.
- (d) End the text of an ad with a suggested action a potential visitor may want to take. For example, provide a free telephone number they can call, or a postcard they can mail for information.
- (e) Include in the ad the signature of the resort manager (or for very large facilities, a corporate officer) under a promise to serve the visitors honestly and well.
- (f) Use a layout that draws the reader to the advertisement, guides the reader through it and presents an overall positive image.

- (g) Ensure the text is enthusiastic and sincere, that it emphasizes the positive, minimizes the negative, and is absolutely honest.
- (h) Maximize the name of the resort and the location, regardless of the status of recovery from the disaster.

When developing advertising, it is cost-effective to work with other resorts and the state or regional tourism agencies. Ads that link several resorts or nearby destinations also indicate that the visitor will be offered a range of opportunities.

Place ads with those media that previous visitors used to discover your resort and location. Place them in those outlets with the highest degree of public credibility. In order, these are: newspapers, television, magazines and radio. While television can offer a visual effect, print provides memory on paper that can be clipped and saved. This makes it important to include names, addresses and telephone numbers in the text. Take advantage of increased publicity created by the disaster. Increase regular advertising. Thanks to heightened awareness among the public about your destination, advertising done during this period will be more effective and longer lasting.

Immediately after the disaster, plan an "open letter" ad which addresses questions travellers may have about the crisis. This type of ad may have a long body of text, should have a simple visual design to focus attention on content, and works best if signed by a resort manager or local official who would be expected to know what is going on. Advertising placed in the weeks following the "open letter" should begin to relay the message that the crisis situation is reverting back to normal. These ads should emphasize the positive. However, never misrepresent the status of the area or your resort.

Before sending advertising copy to the chosen media outlet, recheck it for interest, clarity, purpose, honesty and credibility. Remember that, because of the nature of the subject, crisis advertising requires additional considerations of integrity and persuasiveness to achieve the desired effect.

A free telephone call-in service

Experiences at tourist destinations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean document the success of information centres that can be accessed by future visitors and families of current visitors (Bar-On and Paz-Tal, 1994). Establishing a toll-free information line is one of the most efficient ways to address concerns expressed by constituents, communicate the status of the crisis situation and gauge public interest. It is important to be prepared to deal with queries by training those who will be answering calls. A sample service line questionnaire is included in Appendix D. Resort managers can add questions relevant to their individual situations to get the utmost use out of information which can be collected over the telephone. Asking questions of callers will help develop greater understanding about the public's concerns and help to determine advertising effectiveness while providing important facts to constituents.

The main purposes of a free call-in service are to answer the public's questions about the disaster; to help control rumours; to offer ways to promote tourism despite the disaster; to record advertising response; and to show concern for those affected by the disaster. Call-in service can be arranged for on a contingency basis during non-crisis times and activated upon the onset of a disaster. Typically, service lines can be activated within 24 hours. Information service lines need not be operated locally. Resorts that are part of

international corporations can have corporate partners establish service lines in the nations in which most visitors live.

If a resort or industry work group decides to establish its own local information service line, attention should be paid to the following critical requirements for staff who operate the service:

- (a) Staff should be fully informed of the crisis situation. Daily and sometimes hourly updates may be needed.
- (b) They should be familiar with the particular telephone system being used, and should be trained before the storm or flood season begins, or as routine training in earthquake-prone areas.
- (c) Incoming calls should be answered as quickly, efficiently and politely as possible. Those who want to linger on the line must be told that others are also trying to call in.
- (d) Staff should determine if returning calls is appropriate (especially for press queries) and ensure such calls are made rapidly by the most suitable individual.
- (e) They should keep a log of all incoming calls, using a report form, if possible (Appendix D).
- (f) They should be honest about the situation, but emphasize the positive.

Press Relations

News media representatives gather at the site of impending disasters and quickly arrive after unexpected events. Studies on the role of the media (Sonmez *et al*, 1994) and direct experiences with the media (Hayes, 1994; Kreizelman, 1994) provide a series of suggestions on how best to deal with them.

Reporters are full time investigators with little expertise on any subject related to tourism or disasters. Their purpose is to produce interesting stories about the disaster. The majority are general reporters; only a minority are travel-trade reporters. Resort managers and tourism ministry officials have a year-round duty to maintain relations with the news media. Once notice of an impending disaster arises, or the sudden disaster occurs, the news media will arrive in force. If there is a warning period before a calamity strikes, it pays to establish working relations with the media that can be used once the disaster occurs and the industry is busy trying to deal with emergencies. Media relations fall into two categories — the basic relationship and news conferences.

The media will want to speak to anyone who can help them. All members of the industry should be open to contact, but resort managers should establish a single person from the resort to serve as the spokesperson. A single spokesperson for the local tourism industry may also be desirable as this frees others to deal with problems arising out of the disaster and permits the development of a single basic message for the media in line with the marketing message of hope and recovery. Such a spokesperson should be an individual with experience of meeting the media. He or she should have access to information and have the trust of the local tourism industry. Once appointed, the spokesperson should be the recipient of any information the industry members believe will be sought by the news media.

Resort managers and tourism officials should be proactive. They should contact news media representatives in advance of an impending disaster and should quickly establish a relationship of trust and openness. News conferences, press releases and interviews all aid this effort.

News reporters also have a few requirements. They want honest answers to their questions. Although they will ask about every sensitive issue, they do not really expect you to answer every question or lay bare every distressing event. They will, however, quickly discover any attempt to cover up basic facts. They operate on the clock and need help meeting deadlines. They want information and will respect people who are restrained, professional and open, but will bully anyone if they believe it will get them more information.

They are not experts and want help interpreting the meaning of technical issues and the local and national implications of a disaster. Because they are human and will react to suffering just as much as anyone, they will use and often seek stories of human interest and are not insensitive to reporting on hopes for recovery and renewal. They want representative events and stories about actual people.

Resort managers and those selected to be the media contact should be prepared. Have facts and examples at the ready. Anticipate what reporters will ask, what they want to know and what they are most likely to get wrong if left to their own devices. Be prepared to feed them information so that they won't get facts wrong. Correct them as soon as possible if they make a mistake, and be very polite while doing so. Admit the limits to your knowledge and don't hesitate to ask them what they know.

Be accurate, consistent and on time for press conferences and interviews. If you are responsible for media relations, schedule regular meetings with news media at a location that is easy to get to. Make initial statements and regular updates at these meetings. Offer industry representatives and their resorts for interviews and follow-up, but maintain a stable working relationship with the entire pool of news media representatives through the press conference and news release tools.

Maintain credibility at all times by being honest with the news media. Be organized and professional whether the news is good or bad. Test possible responses and statements for accuracy and timeliness. Keep on top of the story and ahead of the press, at least in regard to your resort and operations. If you are behind, offer to provide corroboration, but do not waste their time. Stay in touch with the media as long as they stay on the story of the disaster.

Deal with rumours by labelling them as such. Regular meetings with the news media will reduce the number of rumours. Particularly destructive rumours deserve to be dealt with through a special press conference and news releases.

Remain available to the press whenever possible and fill any news vacuum that might arise with your message of hope and relaunching. Do not be bashful about this. The press is not bashful. If reporters want access to facts or places, do not hamper them. If it is possible to put forward the industry message, be accommodating. If a particular visit is intended to deal with bad news that has already been given out, be polite, but it is not necessary to offer further assistance. Simply explain that the story is old news and the hope and aspirations of the people living under the gloom of the disaster are the focus of the industry's attention now.

News conferences

As the English example demonstrates, a disaster brings large numbers of reporters into a small area (Hayes, 1994). Often they will be staying at the same lodgings and eating together, especially if hotel accommodations have

been reduced as a result of the disaster. Although they are all looking for their own source of facts and their own stories, there is a basic set of facts they all want. These are provided most efficiently through news conferences and press packs. Sample materials for a press pack are provided in Appendix D.

The news conference is simply an opportunity for the resort manager or an appointed media contact to make a statement and answer questions. There are a few rules that news reporters understand and generally respect. Further, there are typical behaviours that reporters will follow. Here are a few principles that, if followed, can make press conferences efficient and effective.

Initiate a schedule of press conferences and release position statements and news releases in the preparatory period before storms and flooding impact the area. Schedule a press conference as soon as possible and practical after earthquakes. Try to schedule conferences in a manner that allows reporters to get stories written and filed by their deadlines. If you don't know when that is, ask the reporters. Disseminate as much accurate information as possible. Tell them what you don't yet know and when you think your information will improve. Work from notes or a briefing book that contains accurate facts. If you are speaking for other resorts, bring specialists who have facts you don't and be prepared to turn to them for answers.

Don't lose control of the press conference. Be in charge of who asks questions, who answers them, when you start and when you end. Maintain a calm and positive manner. Be cooperative and forthright. Journalists want to work quickly. They will ask questions in a manner intended to elicit a response, sometimes giving only two unsatisfactory options for a response. Give them accurate and specific answers to questions and be prepared to reject either option if neither is correct. Give them the correct one or simply say you don't really know, but will attempt to find out. Use the preliminary statement to disseminate most facts and dispel any rumours that have arisen. Acknowledge hearing rumours and give specifics to lay them to rest.

Upon arrival of media members at the site of the press conference, tell them when you will start and be open to informal discussions with them before the start of the conference. Keep such preliminary conversation light and personal. Let them know that basic facts will be given out once the conference begins. Be polite and begin on time. Open the press conference with a self introduction, followed by a prepared statement. Then open the floor to questions. Although many people will attempt to speak at once, acknowledge one person by pointing and saying in a loud, clear voice "Your question please." Allow one follow-up question and then go on to the next person, each time pointing to indicate who is next. Some typical questions and potential answers are provided in Appendix D.

You may choose to prepare packs for the press that contain background information and data on the resort, the damage or the people involved. Distribute these press packs just before the conference begins and have them available after the conference ends. Don't distribute them too early or the reporters are likely to take them and leave.

If other members of the resort management team, or other local resort managers are present, have them wear a name tag and have them sit with the reporters so that they give the impression of being available for further comment after the conference ends. If you don't want them to speak to the press, don't have them at the press conference.

Try to gauge how many people will attend the press conference and hold it in a room that is a little too small, rather than too big, thus avoiding the impression of too little attendance and interest. Invite all members of the media in writing, if possible. Managers of resorts where reporters are staying should be asked to help ensure delivery of invitations. Make the invitations look as official as possible on resort letterhead and signed by the resort manager. Someone should take notes on the press conference to determine what questions were asked, by whom, and what questions were not answered or were answered in a manner that was in any way unsatisfactory. Use this list to prepare for future news releases and conferences. Make sure the reporter asking these questions gets an answer as soon as possible. If television media are present, and especially for interviews, dress in a fashion appropriate to the fact that a disaster has just taken place.

Do not go “off the record” or “on deep background.” This implies there are things to be found out that you don’t want known. If difficult questions are presented, answer them when appropriate and be honest. If the questions deal with confidential, sensitive or personal matters, tell them that and tell them it would be inappropriate to answer that question at this time. If you feel they have asked a question simply to harass you, tell them you feel as though the question is out of place and won’t entertain it. Go on to the next reporter in a professional manner.

Press conferences are working meetings. Food and drink are not appropriate. Breakfast or luncheon meetings should be reserved for public relations efforts and targeted at those reporters who can most assist the relaunching effort. This would include travel-trade writers.

In the wake of a disaster

Once the disaster has struck, resort managers have three major and immediate responsibilities. First and foremost is ensuring the safety of guests, employees and other members of the community. Second is management of the physical recovery from the disaster. Third, and of critical importance, is management of the travelling public’s perceptions as a result of the disaster.

Searches and inspections

Emergency operations throughout the world begin with searches for injured persons, dangerous conditions and immediate risks (Feinberg, 1994). Appendices A, B and C provide checklist sections that resort operators can use to organize these searches.

In some cases, especially earthquakes, initial investigations should be done in teams with set deadlines by which they should return. These teams can get into trouble, especially when examining damaged interior spaces, or in the event of secondary explosions and fires. Thus, resort managers should take special precautions to ensure inspections and searches are well organized and to protect the inspectors.

Facility assessments

The first question that guests and employees will want to know is whether damage requires closing the resort. Appendix E provides a tool for making assessments and reporting them to tourism and government ministries, local officials and telephone call-in services.

Security and safety measures

The economic viability of a resort that survives a disaster can be just as easily threatened by liability from preventable accidents in the wake of the disaster. Resort management must get staff to cordon off dangerous areas. This can easily mean closing buildings until utilities are shut down, fires are extinguished, structural damage is assessed and competent engineers indicate the facility is safe for short- or long-term occupancy. Never put guests or employees at risk.

Insurance activities

Before the disaster, valuable materials and papers should have been secured. Once emergency actions have been taken, contact with insurance agents is appropriate. It is useful to record all damage by photo or video, when possible. Records of all repair costs should also be kept.

Guest assistance

As is documented in Israeli reports, special care for tourists at the time of the disaster is essential (Ben-Hador, 1994). If any of the preparations suggested in the previous section have not been taken, they must be accomplished now. Rosters of guests, their health status, travel plans and departure dates must be prepared. Interpreters and local guides should be provided when needed. Contact with local authorities seeking information on foreign or out-of-the-area guests will be necessary. Travel assistance for guests will be required, as will be regularly updated information on shelter assistance, health facilities and long-distance telephone access. Once again, the communications bulletin board approach used in Mauritius may become the most useful means for keeping guests and staff informed (Morris, 1994).

The marketing message and press relations

Once the disaster has occurred, the news media will become even more active. This is the time when rumours run rampant and misinformation is easily spread. This is the critical point for ensuring the tourism message gets through. Resorts and the tourism industry are part of a larger community. Tourism has its own voice and its own message that the news media and the travelling public listens to. During and immediately after a crisis, this voice can send a powerful message that will help speed the recovery and relaunching of tourism in the area.

The basic industry message is: what happened, what's going on, and when will things get back to normal. The tourism message always ends with the firm statement that there is a future and travellers will want to be part of it. The message, however, is more than simply the information provided. It is the way that information is given. In particular, the message must convey that the industry is being honest, forthright and sincere.

In general, publicly acknowledge the truth, no matter how negative it is. Deliver bad news fully and first to avoid giving the impression that the resort or the industry is not being honest and open. Learn what the actual status of events is and when you don't know, announce that the range and scope of the problem is being investigated. Then be sure you do investigate them.

Relay relevant facts to the news media and in an "open letter" advertisement, including:

- (a) What happened, where and when;
- (b) Who was involved;
- (c) Who is in charge of crisis management and who is the contact for tourists now in the area;
- (d) Who is the contact for travellers who had planned to come to the area in the next few weeks or months;
- (e) The most recent developments;
- (f) What will be the next steps, what is planned;
- (g) The short-term and long-term ramifications for the victims, the community, the general public, the travelling public, the resort and the local tourism industry;
- (h) The estimated recovery period; and
- (i) What can be confirmed at present about the disaster, what is not known, what is being checked on; when more information will be available; and whom to contact for further information.

Whenever possible, discuss what is being done to correct the situation. Emphasize the positive, such as how many people were saved, the efforts of volunteers and teamwork. Show concern. Cite the resort's participation with regard to politically sensitive issues such as assistance to the impoverished, environmentally sensitive areas, endangered species, and known issues that have brought attention to the area in the recent past.

Convey recovery efforts of the resort, the tourism industry and the community at large. Reassure the news media and the travelling public that the area has responded immediately to the crisis and give examples. When possible, discuss plans for reconstruction, community relief efforts and information on clean-up and basic restoration. Focus on recent positive developments in and around the resort. Place attention on the future.

If mistakes have been made at the resort or within the tourism industry, acknowledge them, apologize immediately and fully. Take responsibility for them and explain what will be done to rectify the problems.

Address issues regarding the extent of damage to the destination and what it will mean to travellers. Put this information in terms of when various recovery events will happen, what risks will continue to exist, what the disaster might mean in terms of costs to the traveller. If the cost of visiting the area is to be reduced because some amenities will not be available, explain this and focus on the economic benefit to the traveller. In every case, demonstrate discretion and promote hope.