



USA TRIATHLON
RACE DIRECTOR RESOURCE GUIDE:

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE





INTRODUCTION:

As a Race Director, you are constantly taking steps to mitigate the risk that a critical incident might occur on-site at your event, but there will always be factors outside your control. No race is immune to the possibility that an extreme situation could arise. If it does, it is important you and your team are prepared to respond appropriately.

As a USA Triathlon Sanctioned event, you have the full backing and support of USA Triathlon to help you through a critical incident from beginning to end. We urge you to take advantage of the available resources to help guide you through the crisis management process. Please take the following steps to inform USAT if a critical incident occurs at your event:

WHEN TO INITIATE CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE REPORTING PROCESS

Race Director is informed by event staff or medical personnel that one of the following incidents has occurred, which are defined as **Critical Incidents**:

- a **serious incident**, examples are:
 - bike crash or accident resulting in serious injuries to an athlete or other individual, e.g., suspected/actual broken bones, loss of consciousness, concussion, etc.
 - where the individual is transported by ambulance from the course or venue
- a **vehicle was involved** in the incident or
- a **fatality** has occurred
 - In the event of a fatality, confirmation of a fatality needs to be obtained from a physician, licensed paramedic, EMS professional onsite or medical facility before confirmation of fatality can be released or communicated.

If any of the above occur, **a call must be made to Brad Hildebrandt (402-578-7039) to report the Critical Incident.** This call will ensure that the Critical Incident procedure is initiated internally at USA Triathlon and the USA Triathlon Critical Response Team can guide race directors through the reporting process and information gathering process.

NOTIFICATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION

The Incident Report must be completed and submitted to USAT within 24 hours of confirmed incident.

1. **Notify USAT Official onsite OR notify USA Triathlon directly** (if USAT Certified Official is not onsite):
 - a. Primary USAT Contact: Brad Hildebrandt (402-578-7039 – phone or text)
 - b. Secondary USAT Contact: Kathryn Murtagh (917-747-8574 – phone or text)
 - c. Membership Hotline: 719-725-2209 (phone only)
2. **Submit an Incident Report Form** at the [USA Triathlon Incident Report Portal](#) within 24 hours of confirmed incident
3. **USA Triathlon can provide Media and Communication assistance** to race directors, please see our Crisis Communication Best Practices guide.
4. **For further assistance**, please ask the USAT primary or secondary contact for USAT's Communication Manager's contact details.

Supporting documentation and information must be submitted within 48 hours of the confirmed incident date.



These items are critical to provide for insurance purposes. USAT's insurance carriers expect to be provided with these items and obtaining these items at the time of the incident is often crucial for any later claim or litigation. Please provide to USA Triathlon's Insurance team: insurance@usatriathlon.org.

1. **Witness contact information and statements** (written or recorded)
 - a. Anyone that was a firsthand witness
 - b. E.g., Lifeguards, volunteers, staff, spectators, etc.
 - c. Name, telephone number and email address
2. **Police Report(s)**
3. **Pictures or videos of the incident you might have obtained**
 - a. Witnesses, Law Enforcement, EMS, contractors, staff can be a source of photos or videos.
 - b. Please ask these sources for information.
4. **EMS information/report**
 - a. HIPPA might restrict information from this source but provide what you can
5. Any **local or regional news media coverage** that can be sent, print or video or social Media
6. **Provide all information within 48 hours**

Final Items

If your attempts to contact USAT primary and secondary contacts were unsuccessful:

1. Leave voicemail, text message or send email
2. Leave call back information
3. Do not speculate on the incident, only provide factual, documented information
4. Do not admit fault of any kind
5. If you are unsure how best to communicate, please refer to the Crisis Communication Best Practices Guide or seek further assistance from USA Triathlon

USA Triathlon is here to assist you during the entire process and will make every effort to guide your team throughout all aspects of this trying event.

[USA TRIATHLON INCIDENT REPORT PORTAL](#)



The information in this guide is intended to help Race Directors prepare for a critical incident, but it does not replace the need to engage USAT after an incident occurs. The circumstances of every incident are unique and should be handled on a case-by-case basis with USAT representatives.

In this section, we'll explore the following:

- Preparation Protocols
- Chain of Command
- Incident Categorization
- Communications
- Handling an Incident
- Post-Event Protocols

**Note: While this Guide does provide recommendations for communications and emergency response, all planning and decision-making regarding the event is at the discretion of the local Race Director.*

As you prepare your race plans, there are steps you can take to prepare you and your team to be ready for critical incidents that may occur on-site:

- 1 Key Experts:** Assemble a team of trained personnel who are available to advise and provide input during a critical incident. The guidance of certified medical/safety, meteorology, public health professionals helps to strengthen your on-site response and bolster your public statement.
- 2 Hospital Contacts:** Connect with the local hospital's media relations staff in advance of the event. If there are any athlete transports, you will be able to engage them with inquiries about the patient and their condition.
- 3 Training:** Staff and volunteers should be trained on what to do and who to contact in an emergency situation. Role play different scenarios in advance to reinforce the following:
 - **Radio Etiquette:** When an incident occurs, it is important to remain calm and use a main radio channel to notify the Command Center (Race Director / Medical Director) that an incident has occurred. Communications should then switch to another, more private channel or phone line to communicate the details.
 - **Communication Protocol:** All personnel should know who the Communications Lead is and how to contact them. If approached by the media, all staff and volunteers should politely respond, "All questions and inquiries are being handled by the Communications Lead and the Race Director."

4 Athlete Information: Athlete information, including name, bib number, cell phone number, and emergency contact details should be readily available for the Medical Director and Race Director to reference on-site.

5 Incident Reporting Process: Plan to have incident reports readily available for medical personnel. These can be recorded digitally with iPads/computers/phones or written out on physical copies of the form. A [USAT Incident Report](#) **MUST** be filled out for every athlete that comes into the medical tent.

DID YOU KNOW?

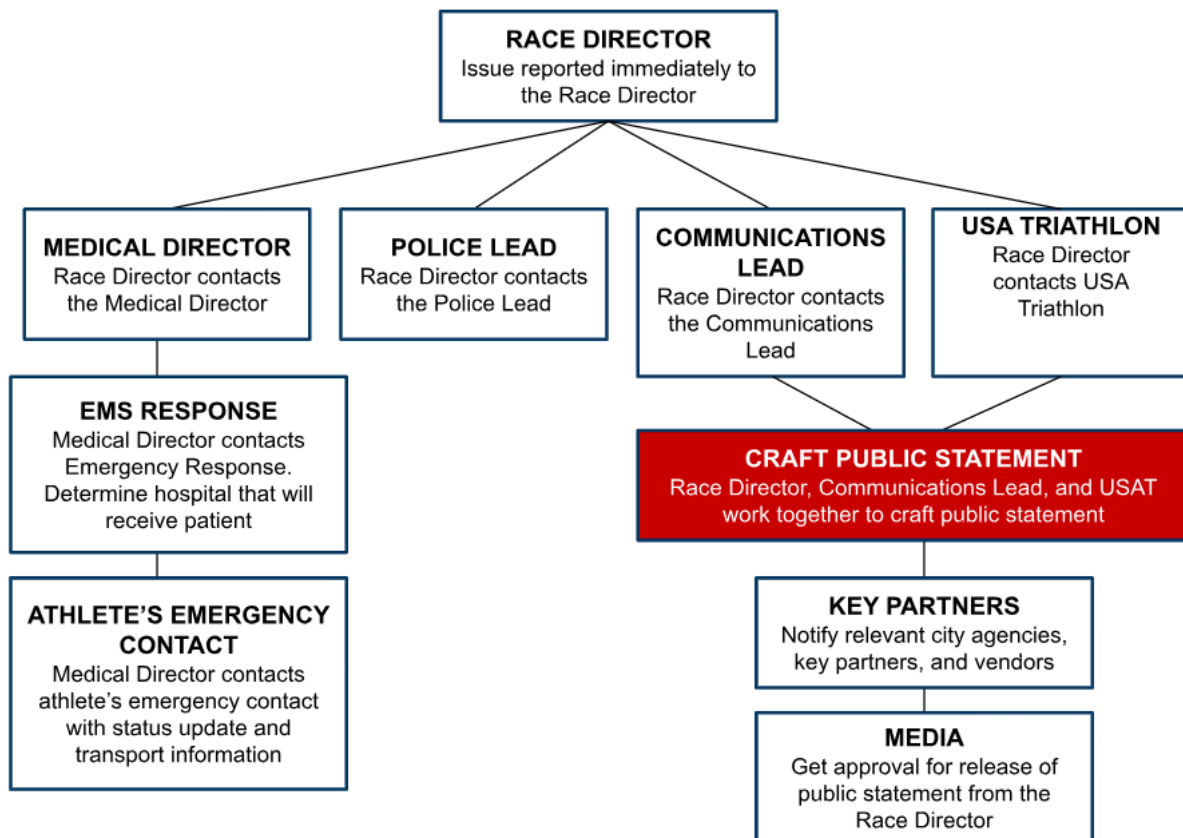
An incident form is required for athletes to use the USAT Participant Accident coverage provided by their membership / license with USA Triathlon.

Pro Tip:

Some medical staff may be apprehensive about sharing an athlete's personal information on the incident report due to HIPAA laws, but since they are a hired contractor at your event and are working for you, they are allowed to share that information with you. Since the athlete is participating at your event and signed your waiver, you have a right to that information in order to protect yourself and USAT.

CHAIN OF COMMAND:

Prior to the event, outline the communication flow for a critical incident to ensure the correct people are notified at the correct time, in the correct manner:





INCIDENT CATEGORIZATION:

It is critical to respond to potential crisis situations with a response which is proportionate to the issue. Too much external response to an issue which has minimal impact can create new problems. Too slow or small a response to a major crisis might put additional people at risk. As incidents are reported, they will be categorized to guide the response that is appropriate to each situation. For example:



Category 1: These are critical incidents that have a major impact on event attendees, the business, and/or have the potential to threaten the organization. These scenarios include risks which are prominent enough to cause: loss of life, significant danger to life, or major reputational impact to event stakeholders. These incidents should be prioritized and immediate action should be taken on-site to address the issue. Crisis communication plans should be enacted as these scenarios are likely to draw significant, widespread, and even lasting media attention.



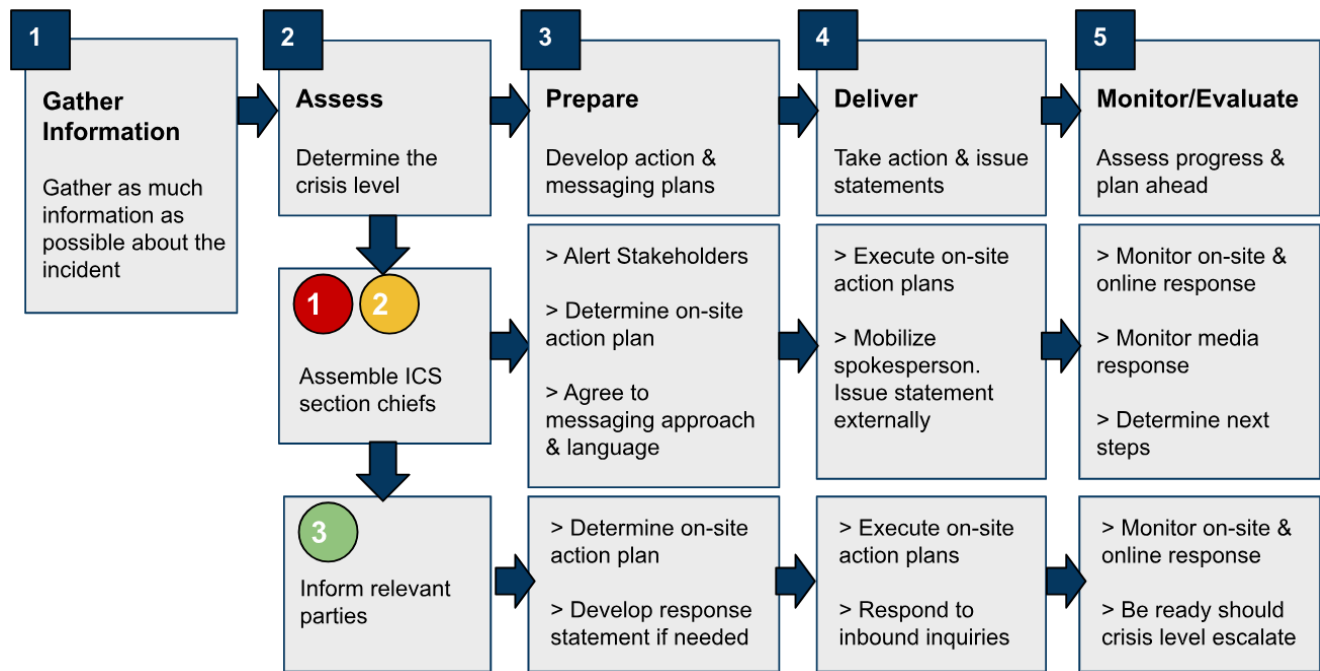
Category 2: These issues are prominent enough to disrupt the flow of the event and have the potential to escalate to a more serious incident. They may cause injury or distress to a small group of attendees, create negative noise around the event, and disrupt “business as usual”. On-site staff should work to address these issues as quickly as possible. The communications team should closely monitor the situation and be prepared to enact plans if necessary.



Category 3: These are minor incidents that are not likely to cause harm to the event. Although the issues may be troublesome for the individuals and/or small groups involved, there is no lasting impact. If these situations are effectively controlled and corrected, they are likely to blow over.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Crisis Communication Workflow: This crisis management flow outlines the ideal process for dealing with threatening issues. In practice, steps may overlap or may need to be repeated. Assessing information quickly and accurately is key. **The first hour is crucial.**



Immediate Communication Considerations: Below are some questions to ask at each stage of the incident categorization process to help guide what should be done and said:



Race Directors are encouraged to engage USAT as soon as an incident occurs. The earlier the better! USAT can assist with public messaging and response. The team can provide guidance for managing the immediate on-site response and can help manage media inquiries during and after the event.



- For medical situations, do not provide the athlete's name or identity publicly before speaking to the family and ideally, receiving written permission to release the identity of the athlete.
- Don't be reflexive! Do not feel pressured by media inquiries or athlete/spectator posts on social media regarding the incident. Before releasing a statement, ensure you have gathered all the correct information and have consulted with USAT. All relevant parties including the Race Director, Medical Director, and USAT should approve messaging before it is released publicly.
- Establish a single media spokesperson. If media inquiries arise before a statement is finalized, the response should be: *"We are gathering information at this time and will share a public statement as soon as it is available."* Take down the reporter's contact information and follow up with the statement as soon as it is finalized.
- For critical incidents that involve one athlete or a small group of athletes, it is not recommended you share any information about the incident with the larger participant base while the event is still happening.
- When a critical incident occurs, it does not always mean you need to adjust your race coverage strategy on social media, but it can. It is important to be aware of your tone and use proper judgment. If an incident has occurred in a public area where lots of participants and/or spectators witnessed the incident, be cognizant of the content you are posting on social media. Posting something that says, *"We're having the best day! What a great event!"* when a tragedy has just occurred can be viewed negatively. If conversations are starting or people are asking questions on your event's Facebook page, you can post the public/media statement on your social page as well – but that's it (don't reply to individual comments or share more detail).

Post-Event Communication Considerations: Post-event, USAT continues to be a resource for your team and is here to support your communications efforts. Continue to monitor social media and email closely, and be responsive to all questions from media, athletes and spectators. Provide the approved written statement as the response to all inquiries.

If follow-up questions are asked in response to the statement, the Communications Lead should work closely with the Race Director and USA Triathlon to handle them on a case-by-case basis.

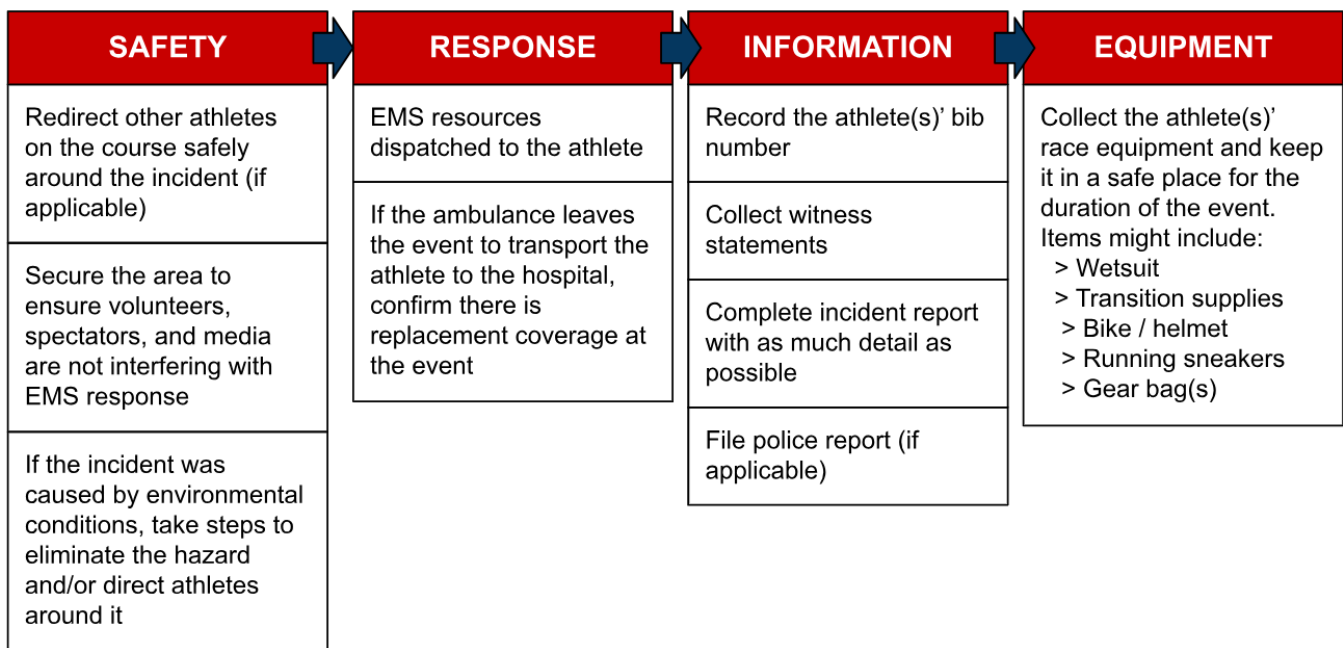
Pro Tip:

If you are ever unsure about what you can or should share or how something might be construed by the media, air on the side of caution. Respond that you are not able to share details out of respect for the privacy of the athlete and his/her family.



HANDLING AN INCIDENT:

When an incident occurs, the most important thing is getting the athlete(s) help as quickly as possible. Communicate the incident using the command structure and ensure the scene of the incident remains clear/safe for others. Take steps to make sure that athletes, spectators or media are getting in the way of the emergency response.



For more information on ways to efficiently structure your communications and command structure, please refer to the following Resource Guides: **Incident Command Structure**, **Race Command**, and **Communications**.

POST-EVENT PROTOCOLS:

Athlete Support:

After the event, the best way to show support to the athlete and/or the family is to be an available resource and help answer any questions in a timely manner. Pass along your contact information and be timely in your responses. They may or may not continue contact, but the gesture of support often goes a long way to help future interactions go smoothly. Here are a few suggested actions to support the athlete:



ATHLETE SUPPORT

- Facilitate the return of the athlete's items following the event using whatever method and at whatever time is going to be most convenient for the athlete and their family.
- If applicable, work with timing company to remove athlete from the event results so athlete does not show up as "DNF"
- If applicable, remove athlete's email from email marketing system and from any lists related to the event to ensure athlete and/or their family does not receive race results and/or race promotions

Volunteer / Staff Support:

When a critical incident occurs, volunteers and staff are often present on the scene and may witness traumatic events. In addition to checking up on the athletes involved in the incident, it is important to follow up to provide support to any other race personnel who were on the scene.

VOLUNTEER / STAFF SUPPORT

Consider sharing Mental Health Resources to encourage staff/volunteers to seek professional psychological treatment.

Insurance / Legal Logistics:

When it comes to sorting out the legal and/or insurance repercussions that might arise as a result of the incident, lean on USAT for assistance.

- Submit all relevant incident reports, witness statements, photos, and/or police reports to USAT as quickly as possible following the event.
- USAT will use sanctioning standards to demonstrate that appropriate safety measures were in place (number of lifeguards/watercrafts, EMS personnel, etc.) and that there is an inherent risk in participating in triathlons.
- If there is an athlete death, USAT will reach out to the emergency contact person and inform them of the Accidental Death Insurance Policy that is available to the family. To be sensitive to the situation, USAT typically waits a few days after the event before reaching out to share the details of this policy.

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