



Category: Issues, Crisis or Reputational Management

Company: SGN

Entry title: Getting the gas back on in Sidcup

Explanation of issues/crisis and objectives:

SGN manages the network that delivers gas to 5.9 million homes and businesses across the south of England and Scotland. On Saturday 5 May 2018, a burst gas main in Sidcup damaged our gas network. More than 221,000 litres of water flooded through 24 miles of our pipes following the damage, cutting off gas supplies to around 1,700 local properties.

We launched a massive engineering operation to remove the water from our network, working 24/7 over the following nine days to restore gas supplies. As a Communications team, our objectives were:

- Reassure those affected that we were in control of the situation and working to restore gas supplies in a safe and timely manner
- Keep affected customers, stakeholders and media regularly updated on our progress through various communication channels
- Provide 24-hour communications support to operational colleagues, including throughout the bank holiday weekend.

Research, planning and strategy:

Our incident communications strategy is to deliver proactive, informative communications which reinforce SGN as the authority working to keep the community safe.

We have thorough incident communications procedures, including specifically tailored messaging for when water damages our gas network. We look to industry peers and resilience partners in their incident handling to help further shape and develop our approach and messaging. All our spokespeople receive biannual media training to practice their delivery of these messages.

Tactics and their implementation, including creativity and innovation:

We utilised various channels to share stories from site to illustrate progress and explain what

a difficult job we faced. Through this, we aimed to provide useful, practical information to affected residents which would increase public understanding and encourage goodwill.

We published regular updates on our dedicated incident webpage, including over the bank holiday and outside of office hours, and linked to this page from our social media posts. We used photos and videos to bring our written updates to life, all captured by our in-house team. To ensure a constant supply of quality content, a Comms team member was onsite for the incident duration to gather photos and video clips, as well as manage visiting media and politicians. Hosting these visits and providing proactive statements to other key influencers, all helped extend the reach of our updates beyond our channels alone.

With so much information being shared in the outside world, it was vital that we communicated to our own people too through our employee app. By keeping the rest of our employees across England and Scotland fully updated, it gave those not involved an understanding and appreciation of the challenges their 120 colleagues faced.

As part of our end-of-incident comms, we created our first post-incident infographic, which we shared on our website and social channels to demonstrate the scale of the event and thank the local community for their support. We commissioned it during the incident so that we could quickly share after the event without losing momentum.

Demonstrate how negative impacts were avoided, positives achieved and improvements made:

We established ourselves as the authority on the incident by sharing consistent, meaningful information for the public and press. We pushed ourselves by committing to publishing web updates every four hours and tweeting every two hours between 8am and 10pm, which is more than usual. Each website update ended with the time of the next update, which we adhered to even when there wasn't a lot of progress to report. This commitment ensured there was never an information vacuum, with affected residents looking elsewhere for reassurance, which meant we retained our authority throughout.

Our onsite engagement with politicians further supported our efforts to increase public understanding and goodwill. We twice hosted local MP James Brokenshire on site and he was so pleased by this, he tweeted to his 22,300 followers and linked back to our webpage: <https://twitter.com/JBrokenshire/status/994990462971899904>.

We constantly listened to the affected community, both onsite and online, for any issues we could tackle through our comms. For example, we received a social media comment regarding a road name missing from the list of affected roads online. Thanks to our extended social media monitoring outside of office hours, we could check with the onsite team, respond to the resident and update our website within minutes.

Measurement and evaluation:

During the nine-day incident, we posted 34 website updates and 44 social media updates targeted at the 1,700 affected homes and businesses.

Our dedicated incident web page received 42,551 views, which made up 41% of the total page views across our entire website during the incident period. In addition, our average daily website visitor numbers during this time increased by 156% from 1,220 to 3,130. Our social media posts gained 224,674 impressions with 6,103 engagements. Our six videos received 7,489 views with 4,905 of these from our social posts and a further 2,584 YouTube views.

Such was the quality of our online website updates, news outlets took everything they needed from our website rather than call us. We shared our own photography with BBC News and News Shopper for use online and BBC London even requested to use our video clips for broadcast, which aired as part of their morning news broadcast on 10 May.

Our internal communications increased support for the teams involved in the operation, resulting in unprompted engagements on our posts from colleagues across the south of England and Scotland.

We received emails and social posts from the community, specifically praising our communications around the incident (see attached supporting evidence). From the quantitative and qualitative data we've evaluated, we can proudly conclude we achieved our incident comms objectives.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

We managed our communications response in-house using the skills and resources of our six-strong External Communications team plus two press officers outside of the core team.

There was no extra budget for our response. Our only additional costs incurred were £2,124 for employee overtime across the nine-day incident (including weekend and bank holiday premiums) and £900 for the post-incident infographic. In total, our additional Communications team costs came to £3,024.