Crisis Communications: Tornado Hits Airport-April 22, 2011

- Regional Crisis – Airport is top asset in St. Louis region serving catchment of 4 million people across two states (MO/IL)

- Health/Safety – Lives threatened, lives saved

- Travel Impact – Passengers stranded, flights cancelled

- Economic Impact – Region, Airport, airlines, tenants

- Brand Reputation – Emergency response, rebuilding efforts

- World wide attention
Crisis Communications: Tornado Hits Airport
Crisis Communications:
Tornado Hits Airport

National Weather Service Warning: Tornado Alert across St. Louis region
   • Sirens sounding in community
   • Around Airport

Lambert Operations in communication with contract weather service about specific information to activate emergency warnings:
   • Tornado touchdown confirmations
   • Tornado locations
   • Tornado path

Emergency Procedures
   • Radio Airport departments/airlines/operations
   • Alert public to move to safer areas- lower levels, interior, restrooms
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Police Watch Commander-first to sight tornado
- Called for police to evacuate concourses
- Move people inside, to terminal lower levels, restrooms

Passengers and Employees
- Police warnings and evacuations underway when tornado hit
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Courtesy: KTVI, KSDK and KMOV
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8:15 p.m.
• Airport wide emergency call out
• Director, OPS, PR, Airfield, Building Maintenance...
• City/County emergency agencies

First minutes
• OPS Tower - “Damage and injuries”
• Emergency responders on scene
• Media – cell phone, email, texts to confirm and comment

Crisis Confirmed
• Some flights diverted
• Significant damage
• Airport closed
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First 30 minutes

• Local media wanted live “phoners”
• Confirmed only damage and medical responders on scene

First Hour

• Lambert PR/ Mayor’s Press Secretary on scene
• Briefings from Airport Police, Airport OPS, Director
• Scheduled joint City/County news conference for 10 p.m.
• Media already on scene: live reports, b-roll, interviews
• National media on alert and calling
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2 hours
Joint News Conference- Local/ National Media
  Mayor, Airport Director, County Executive, Airport Police Chief, Airport Fire Chief, County Police Chief and others

Messaging:
  • Limited and minor injuries
  • Airport closed
    • Full power lost-emergency generators active
    • Debris on airfield and major roadways in/around Airport
    • C Concourse damaged
    • Terminal 1 damage
  • Damage assessments underway
  • Cleanup underway
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Courtesy: KSDK
Crisis Communications: Tornado Hits Airport

3 Hours- (11p.m.- 2a.m.)
Reinforced Key Messages

Director/Mayor: media access and interview in C Concourse

PR: media relations
• Responded to dozens of media inquiries
  • Live phoners
  • Background
  • Confirmations
  • Setups for live shots for following day
• News Release #1-Lambert Closed due to severe storm damage”
• Website
• Social Media
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Day 2 - Messaging: Working to open Airport

• Live Shots/ Live Phoners began 4 a.m.-throughout day

• 10 a.m. Joint News Conference #2- City/County leadership

• 11 a.m.
  • News Release #2- “Working to restore partial ops”
  • Concourse C media tour #2- Cleanup and Construction

• 2 p.m. Released security cam video of tornado

• 3:30 p.m. Joint News Conference #3-including Missouri Governor

• 5 p.m. News Release #3- “Lambert to land first flights tonight”
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Day 2-

Courtesy: KTVI
Crisis Communications: Tornado Hits Airport

Day 2 - Social Media Messaging: Working to open Airport

@flystl Lambert-STL Airport
Massive cleanup efforts continue @flystl as crews work to seal up

flystl Lambert-STL Airport
Let there be light...power has been restored @flystl....Reminder
flight info for tomorrow...check with your individual airline for more info.

flystl Lambert-STL Airport
As many as nine flights arriving tonight as airlines begin to ramp up to normal operations at #flystl. Call airlines for latest info.

Retweeted by trvlinsalesgal and
Mike Columbo at Lambert International Airport

Courtesy: KMOV
Day 3- Easter Sunday
Messaging: Airport Recovers

• Live Shots/ Live Phoners began 4 a.m.-throughout day

• 8 a.m. Director- Live Interviews various outlets

• 3:30 p.m.- News Conference #4- Director Only

• 5 p.m. News Release # 4 “Lambert successful in resuming 70% of flights on Sunday”
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Day 3 - Easter Sunday

Courtesy: CNN, MSNBC, FOX News
Crisis Communications:
Tornado Hits Airport

Day 3- Social Media Messaging: Airport Open Again

flystl Lambert-STL Airport
Terminal 1, Terminal 2, Concourses A and B are fully operational @flystl. Frontier is located @ B10 and Air Tran is now operating on B12

24 Apr Favorite Reply Delete

Concessions are also open on the A and B concourses @flystl.

24 Apr via HootSuite
Favorite Reply Delete

Retweeted by Buluk3472 and 6 others
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Day 4 + = Highlighting progress of key developments

- Airlines relocations - 2 previously closed concourses
- Concession moves - 11 new/relocated revenue units
- Damage and insurance assessments
- Local, State, Federal VIP Tours: Homeland Sec. Janet Napolitano
- Community Outreach – thanks to entire region for support and concern
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Communication plan

• Responsive - ready from minute one
• Strong internal communications—confirm what’s happened, what is not known.
• Contribute – give media additional info to move the story
• Access- news conferences, media avails, tours, video releases
• Media logistics-how will media work in your facility?
• Maximize all platforms-traditional and social media

Our messaging came down to this:

• People first--extremely fortunate no one was seriously hurt
• We have numerous challenges
• We have a set of goals
• We have a plan
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The Payoff

• Honest, reassuring, confident communications during crisis stabilized and motivated the community and region.

• Tremendous support from our citizens, our businesses and our community.

• Support, thanks and congratulations from across the country—passengers, airports, airlines, industry.

• [www.flystl.com](http://www.flystl.com): 414,000 page hits (4-15 to17) to 7.9 million page hits 4-22 to 24)

• Twitter/flystl: 80 followers to 1,400 in 3 days
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AAAE- “Stellar Work”

KCIAirport – “Congratulations on your speedy rebound”

KatiesTrail - “#STL is back up and running at full capacity. Well done. Very well done.”

Jonisick - “Kudos to #STL and #AmericanAirlines for the quick turnaround...”

Lisa Stark/ABC News - “You guys are fabulous at providing information - whether it's a destroyed terminal or a diverted flight! Much appreciated. Other airports could take a lesson from you all!”
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