DOWNS SAILING CLUB

MAJOR INCIDENT ACTION CARD 3

PRESS LIAISON OFFICER

1. Obtain a briefing from the Incident Control Officer and maintain close contact.

2. Prepare a draft press statement (and one for members) in conjunction with the Incident Control Officer. Confine any statement to the bare facts. Do not speculate about the cause of the incident or any issues of responsibility. A suitable statement could be on the following lines but will need to be adapted to suit the circumstances:

   > "We regret to confirm that a member of the club has died following an incident that took place during a race earlier today. The club's safety boat assisted in bringing the member ashore. Unfortunately, resuscitation attempts by club members and the ambulance service proved unsuccessful. The club is offering every assistance to the authorities and is in contact with the member's family, to whom we have extended our deepest sympathies."

3. Try to ensure that others do not comment to the media. It is important to have a single consistent message. The points listed below should help in dealing with the media:

   • Remember that reporters and photographers have a job to do, often against very tight deadlines. They are far more likely to co-operate with you if you co-operate with them.

   • Do not approach the media yourself – wait for them to contact you

   • Do not reveal or confirm the identity of any casualties unless you are advised by the police, casualty themselves or next of kin that it is all right to do so

   • Do not be drawn into speculating about causes, blame or possible outcomes

   • If you do not know the answer to a question, or are not prepared to give one, be honest about it and never try to bluster. "I'm sorry, I don't have enough information

to confirm that" or "I think it would be inappropriate to speculate about that at the current time" are perfectly acceptable responses.

• Always accept an invitation to be interviewed if you possibly can. If you are worried about talking 'live', offer to read a prepared statement. Declining an interview or refusing to comment will almost certainly be interpreted as you having something to hide. For the same reason, don't say "no comment" in reply to a difficult or awkward question – something along the lines of "I'm sorry but I don't think it would be appropriate to express an opinion until we've had the opportunity to consider all the factors contributing to this incident" amounts to the same thing but sounds far less evasive.

• By the same token, never lie to the media (e.g. by denying something you know may be true). You will almost certainly be found out and they will feel entitled to treat you accordingly.

• Speak clearly and answer concisely. Don't be long-winded or monosyllabic. Look for opportunities to make some positive points of your own – "Yes, the members are very shocked. The club has an excellent safety record and nothing like this has ever happened before despite our very busy and active racing calendar.
If the interview is being pre-recorded, don't be afraid to start your answer again if you find yourself getting tongue-tied – "Sorry, can I start that again?"
If giving a TV interview, look at the reporter, not the camera. Make sure you're comfortable and ask to move if, for example, the sun is in your eyes. Don't put your hands in your pockets – clasped comfortably behind your back is best.
It's worth noting the tricks that politicians use to deflect awkward questions and get their own point across – "That's a very good question and deserves to be answered but what I think is far more important is..."

• It's helpful when framing your answers to remember the acronym RACE, for Remorse, Action, Context and Exception:

> "First and foremost, our thoughts are very much with ….. and his family and I know that all our members will join me in hoping he makes a rapid and full recovery (Remorse) .. Fortunately, our safety boat reached him very quickly and there is no doubt that their prompt action helped to prevent a far more serious situation. Nevertheless, we will be reviewing all our safety procedures to see if there are any lessons we can learn for the future (Action) ... Racing at this level is always extremely competitive but the boats are well-prepared and the leading crews are very experienced (Context) ... This is the first time in the last….. years we've been running this event that there has ever been a serious injury (Exception)"

• Be sincere and don't be afraid to show your emotions. You will come across more naturally

5. Keep a log of all media inquiries and contacts (telephone numbers and names)