National Transportation Safety Board

Managing Communications Following a Major Aviation Accident or Incident

NTSB MEDIA RELATIONS AND ACCIDENT RELATED COMMUINICATIONS

Junta de Investigación de Accidentes de Aviación Civil

April 14, 2016

overview

- Accident Investigation Communications
- Recent Changes
- Communications Lanes
- Case Study
- Do’s/Don’ts

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS MISSION

- Keep the public informed of the Safety Board's work and its efforts to improve transportation safety.
- Provide communications guidance to organizations involved in NTSB accident investigations

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Director + 4 PAOs + 1 videographer/photographer

WE CAN BE A VERY VALUABLE RESOURCE TO ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN AN NTSB ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

INTERACTION WITH NTSB

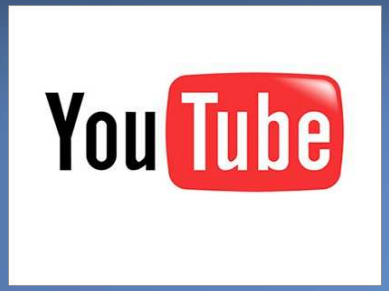
Objective: Information Sharing

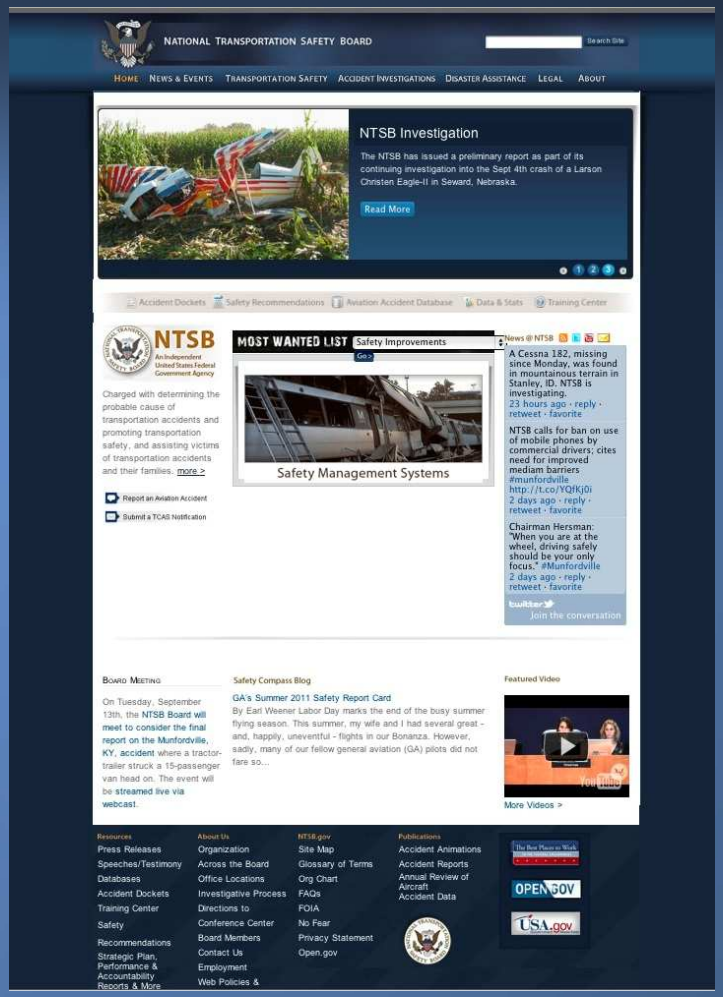
- Communicators should reach out to NTSB Public Affairs ASAP after occurrence of accident/incident
- Communication channel will stay open throughout the course of investigation (12-18 months)

ON-SCENE INFO FLOW FROM NTSB

- Media briefings
- Photo opportunities
- One-on-one interviews (local and national)
- NEW CONTENT: Video and photos
- NEW COMM CHANNELS: Social Media

social media





Media briefing, Philadelphia, May 2015

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E 5th St.
National Transportation Safety Board
Oakland, California
NTSB

Regional investigator conducts briefing

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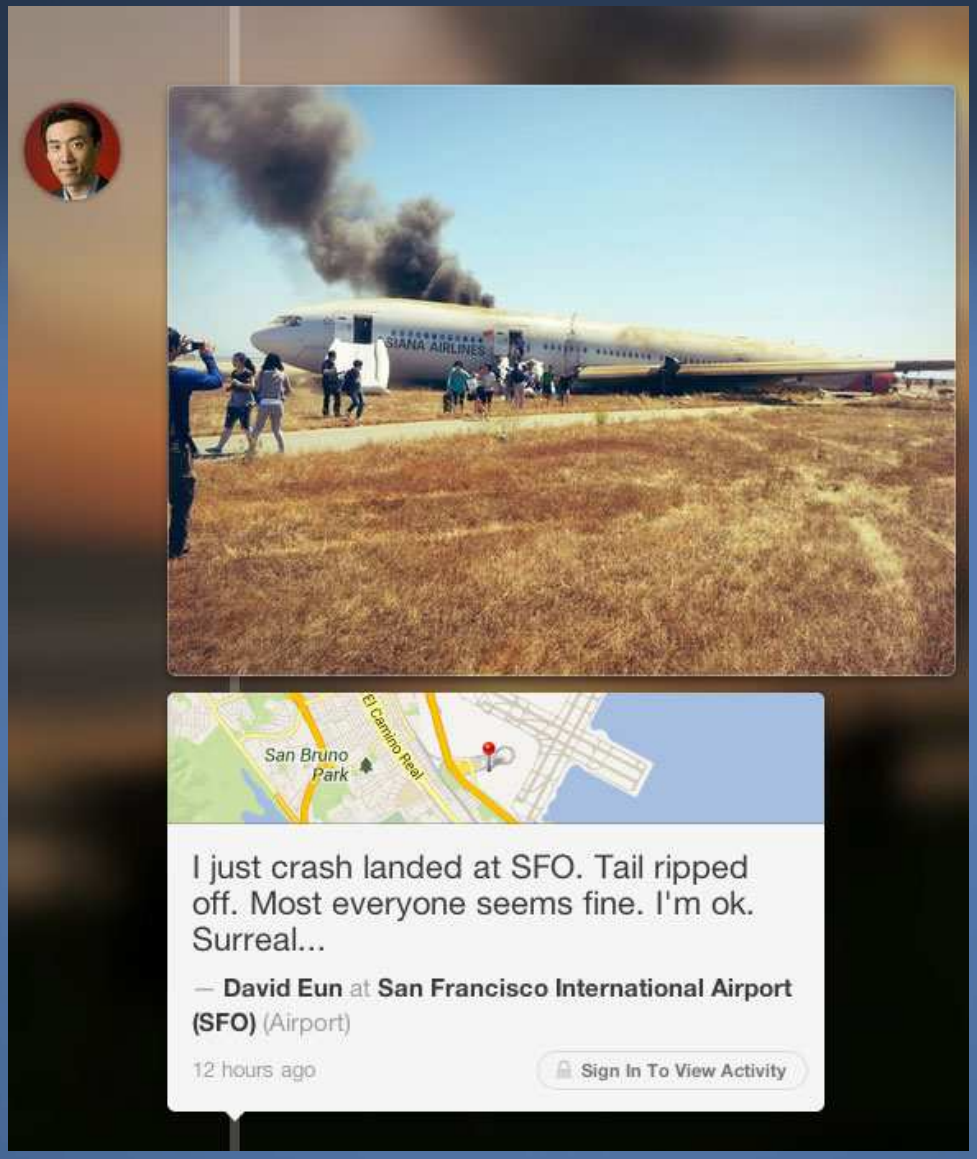
PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

- Initial photos and video uncontrolled
- Media pool of site with investigators after all human remains and personal effects are removed
- Photo op of CVR/FDR at lab in DC

Uncontrolled/early access images


SIANA AIRLINES
San Bruno Park
El Camino Real
I just crash landed at SFO. Tail ripped off. Most everyone seems fine. I'm ok. Surreal...
— David Eun at San Francisco International Airport (SFO) (Airport)
12 hours ago
Sign In To View Activity

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Media pool/controlled access

Photos provided by NTSB

(UPS Flight 1354, Birmingham, August 2013)

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Photos provided by NTSB

(Recorders from UPS Flight 1354, August 2013)

WHY WE TALK TO THE PRESS

- Official source of independent accident info
- Investigation speaks with one voice
- Transparency fosters confidence
- If we don’t, someone else will
- Parties and leaks

FACTUAL INFORMATION

- Information that doesn’t change
- Often preliminary
- Without analysis
- We never speculate but others always will

FACTUAL INFORMATION NTSB MIGHT RELEASE

- Contents of interviews
- Information from vehicle recorders
- Measurements and specific times of accident events
- Other findings on-scene

ACCURACY OF INFO

NTSB uses three step process to foster accurate reporting & correct false/misleading info:

1) Provide factual info at media briefings
2) Monitor coverage for accuracy
3) Respond to inaccuracies by contacting reporter and/or media outlet to clarify and/or request correction

QUESTIONS WE WON'T ANSWER

- Is it possible….?
- Could that mean…?
- Could you give some possible reasons for…?
- What's your personal opinion of…?

RULE OF THUMB

If the question can be answered the day before the accident, it can probably be answered after the accident

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PARTIES ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED FROM…

- Releasing accident-related information to the news media.
- Commenting on or analyzing NTSB findings prior to the Board meeting to the determine the probable cause of the accident.

From Section VIII on Page 5 of the Party Agreement:

Party participants or their respective organizations must refrain from providing opinions or analysis of the accident outside of the participants in the investigation. Failure to abide by these requirements may lead to removal of a party from the investigation.

Link to NTSB Party Agreement

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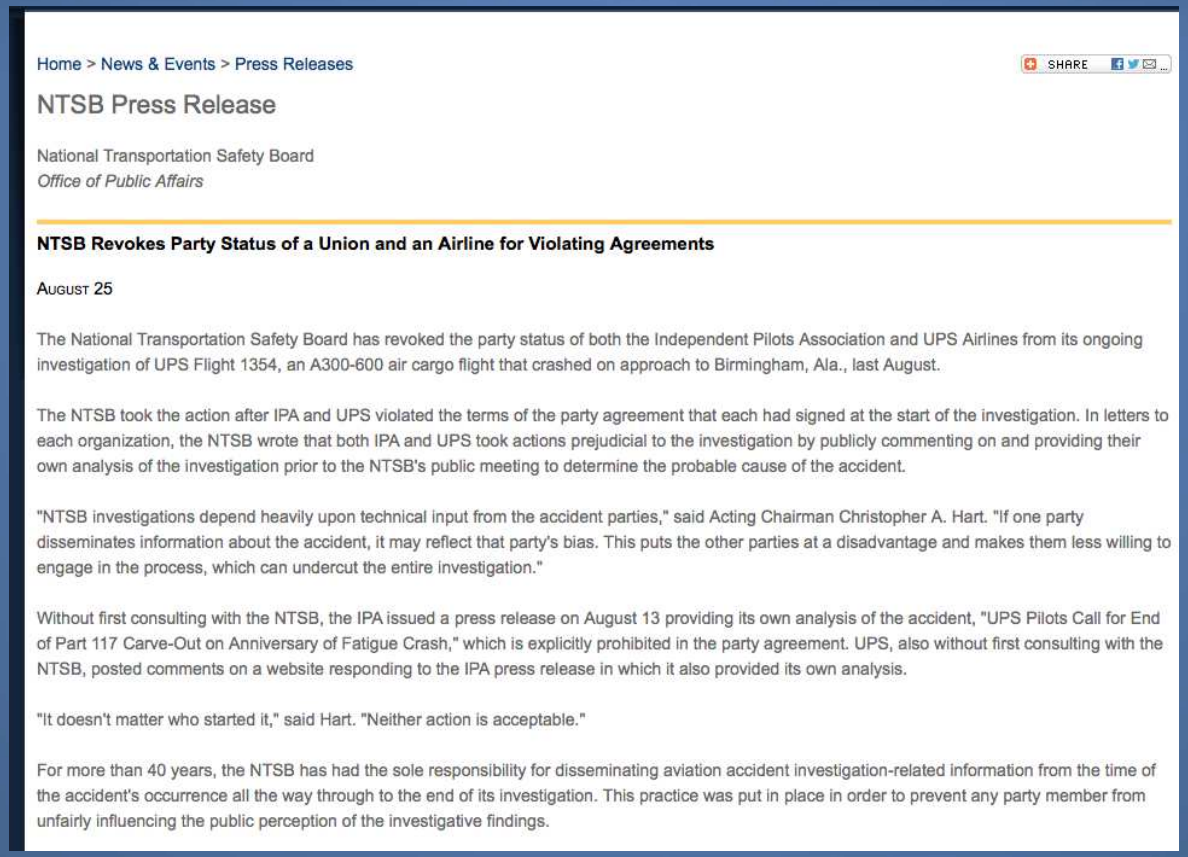
LANE DEPARTURES MAY HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES



Home > News & Events > Press Releases

SHARE

NTSB Press Release

National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Public Affairs

NTSB Revokes Party Status of a Union and an Airline for Violating Agreements

AUGUST 25

The National Transportation Safety Board has revoked the party status of both the Independent Pilots Association and UPS Airlines from its ongoing investigation of UPS Flight 1354, an A300-600 air cargo flight that crashed on approach to Birmingham, Ala., last August.

The NTSB took the action after IPA and UPS violated the terms of the party agreement that each had signed at the start of the investigation. In letters to each organization, the NTSB wrote that both IPA and UPS took actions prejudicial to the investigation by publicly commenting on and providing their own analysis of the investigation prior to the NTSB's public meeting to determine the probable cause of the accident.

"NTSB investigations depend heavily upon technical input from the accident parties," said Acting Chairman Christopher A. Hart. "If one party disseminates information about the accident, it may reflect that party's bias. This puts the other parties at a disadvantage and makes them less willing to engage in the process, which can undercut the entire investigation."

Without first consulting with the NTSB, the IPA issued a press release on August 13 providing its own analysis of the accident, "UPS Pilots Call for End of Part 117 Carve-Out on Anniversary of Fatigue Crash," which is explicitly prohibited in the party agreement. UPS, also without first consulting with the NTSB, posted comments on a website responding to the IPA press release in which it also provided its own analysis.

"It doesn't matter who started it," said Hart. "Neither action is acceptable."

For more than 40 years, the NTSB has had the sole responsibility for disseminating aviation accident investigation-related information from the time of the accident's occurrence all the way through to the end of its investigation. This practice was put in place in order to prevent any party member from unfairly influencing the public perception of the investigative findings.

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staying in your lane - operators

- If fatal accident, condolences and arrangements for survivors and family members
- Accommodations made for affected customers
- How the operator is working with the NTSB (number of staff assigned, etc)
- Accident/incident effect on operations
- Annual revenues, statistics and company information

staying in your lane - operators

- Actions the operator is taking to address any safety issues identified post-accident/incident (use caution here: be sure to clear all investigation related information with NTSB IIC)
- General information about safety protocols and processes
- Passenger list (coordinate with NTSB Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance)

staying in lane - manufacturers

- How many aircraft have been manufactured
- How many aircraft are currently in service and hours/cycles operated
- How many incidents or accidents the aircraft has been involved in worldwide
- General description of equipment and its functions
- How many company investigators are assigned to work with the NTSB

staying in lane – 1st responders

- General description of accident and emergency response activities
- How many vehicles were dispatched
- What organizations participated in response
- What time accident call was received
- How many transported to hospitals
- If there were fatalities
- Impacts and next steps in response activities

staying in your lane - airports

- Impact on operations
- Arrangements for survivors and family members
- Extent of airport fire and rescue response
- Airport layout

staying in your lane

PRESS RELEASES

If press release or statement contains accident investigation related information, it must be cleared by the NTSB investigator-in-charge (IIC).

staying in your lane

PRESS RELEASES

Press release or statements that do not contain accident investigation-related information, do not need to be cleared by NTSB, however, we do recommend that these by shared with the PAO on-scene prior to release.

NTSB MEDIA ACTIVITIES FOR VIRGIN GALACTIC ACCIDENT

- On-scene media presence in Mojave, Calif., for 3 days
- 4 media briefings
- 79 tweets
- About 25 interviews

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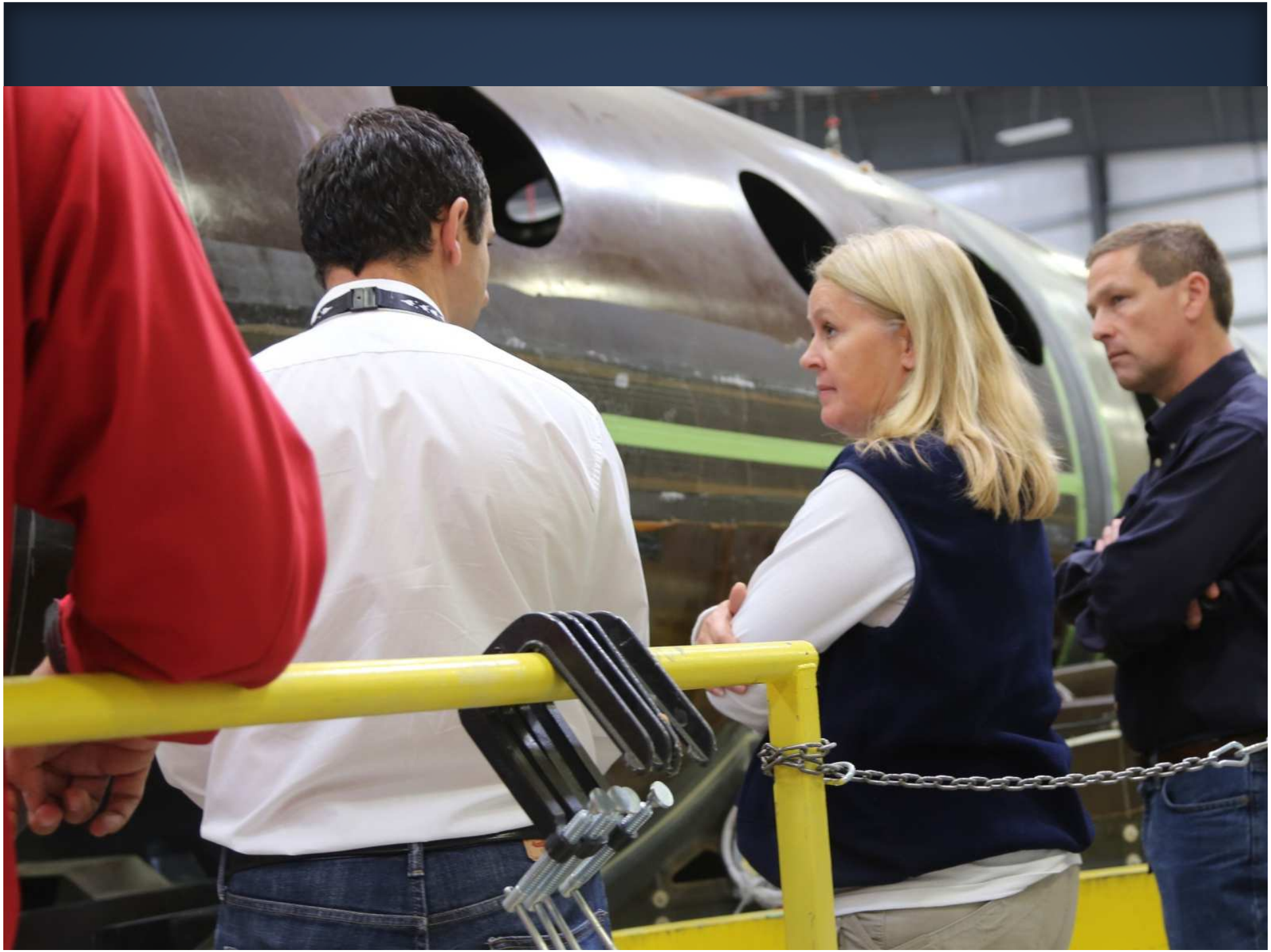
VMSEVE



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NAMES

The NTSB does not release names of passengers, drivers or others involved in the accident.

HOWEVER…

NAMES

Names of crewmembers or others involved in the accident may appear in documents that will become publically available when accident docket is opened (usually more than 3 months following accident).

ATC and CVR Recordings

- Air Traffic Control (public) and Cockpit Voice Recorder (private) recordings are sometimes confused
- ATC often available within hours on websites

COCKPIT VOICE RECORDER

- Federal legislation prohibits release of CVR audio by NTSB
- We characterize sounds and dialogue
- Transcript released at fact-finding hearing

National Transportation Safety Board

Case Study of Crisis Communications Following a Rail Accident

Robert Sumwalt
Peter Knudson

Amtrak 188
May 12, 2015
Philadelphia, PA
8 Fatalities

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106 MPH
'Reckless' speed
50-mph limit
Toll rises to 7
Engineer mum
"THERE'S NO WAY in the world that he should have been going that fast into the curve."
That was the incredulous response of Philadelphia's mayor to news that engineer Brandon Bostian's (r.) Amtrak train was traveling 106 mph in a 50-mph zone, causing Tuesday night's horrific derailment.
PAGES 2,3,4,5,6,7

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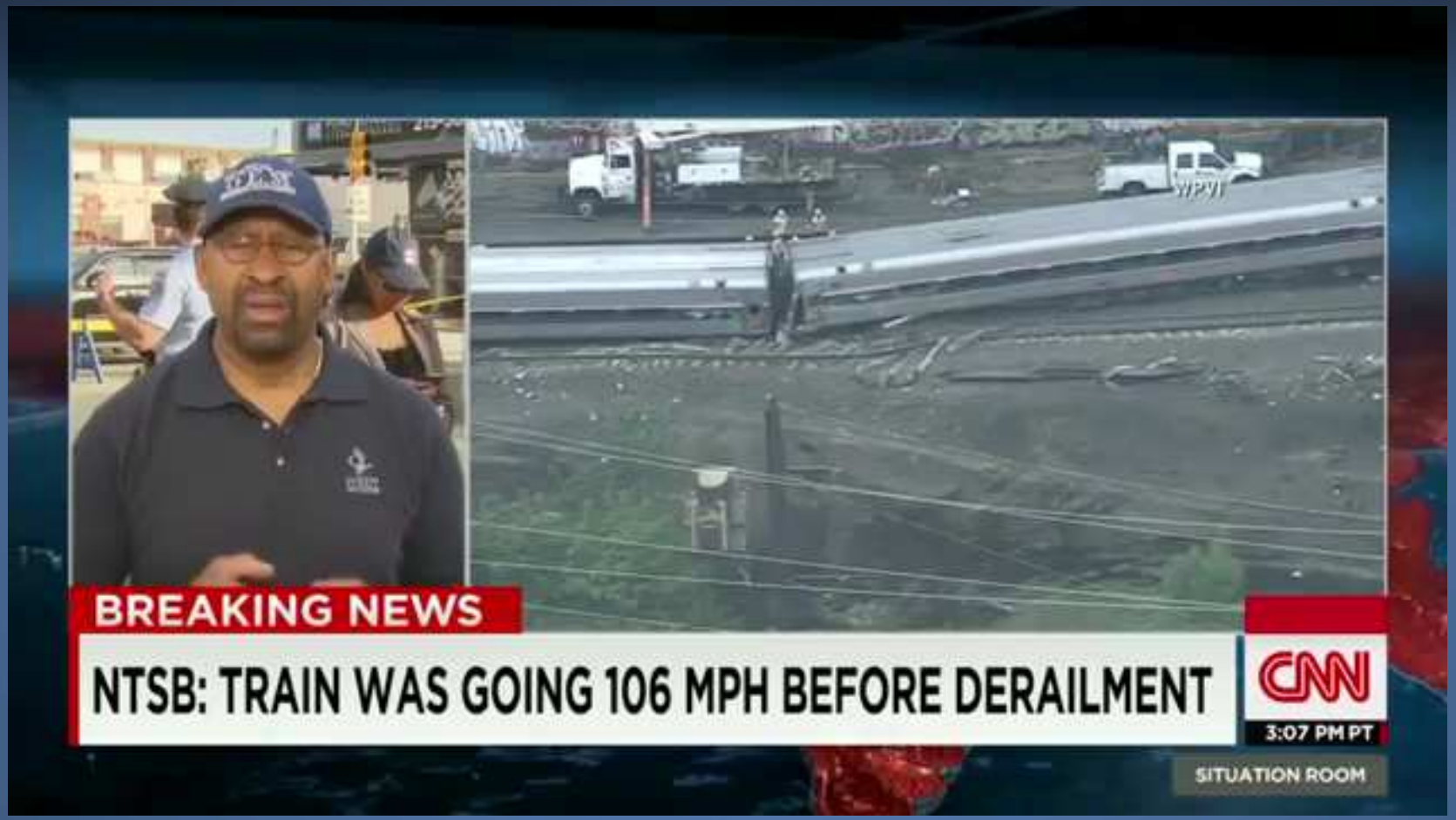
Peter coordinated over 100 TV interviews

NO TURN ON RED


BREAKING NEWS
NTSB: TRAIN WAS GOING 106 MPH BEFORE DERAILMENT
CNN
3:07 PM PT
SITUATION ROOM

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Robert's Crisis Communications Tips

- Be prepared
- Display command presence
- Show compassion
- Demonstrate transparency
- Stay in your lane
- Remember your message

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Crisis Communications Tip

BE PREPARED

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Be prepared

- Know the facts
- Identify your talking points
- “Murder board”

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Crisis Communications Tip

DISPLAY COMMAND PRESENCE

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Command Presence

- Be in control; control the environment
- Don’t be overrun by the media

Command Presence

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P.S. – Don't be defensive!

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Crisis Communications Tip

SHOW COMPASSION

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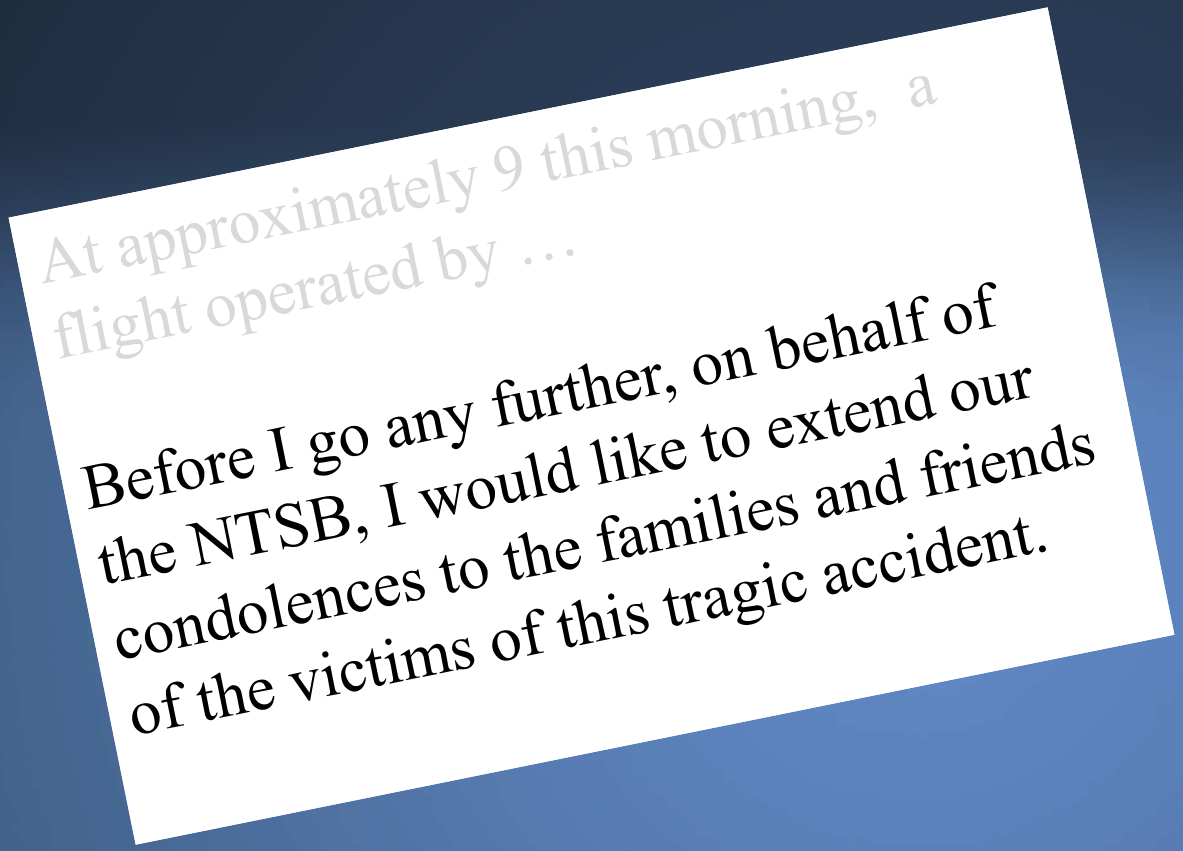

- Don't *read* this – speak from the heart!
- Show that you care!
- Show compassion!

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Crisis Communications Tip

DEMONSTRATE TRANSPARENCY

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NBC News Investigation of Crumb Rubber

UNITED STATES
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AGENCY
USE
OTHER
DOOR
UNITED STATES • ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY •
NBCNEWS.COM

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The way you answer *does matter*

What was the speed of the airplane as it departed the runway?

"I can't answer that."

If you are the investigator

"One of the many things the investigation will do is develop a complete timeline of events, including speeds throughout the accident sequence."

If you are the operator

"The NTSB is conducting the investigation, so that question would best be directed to them."

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Crisis Communications Tip

STAY IN YOUR LANE

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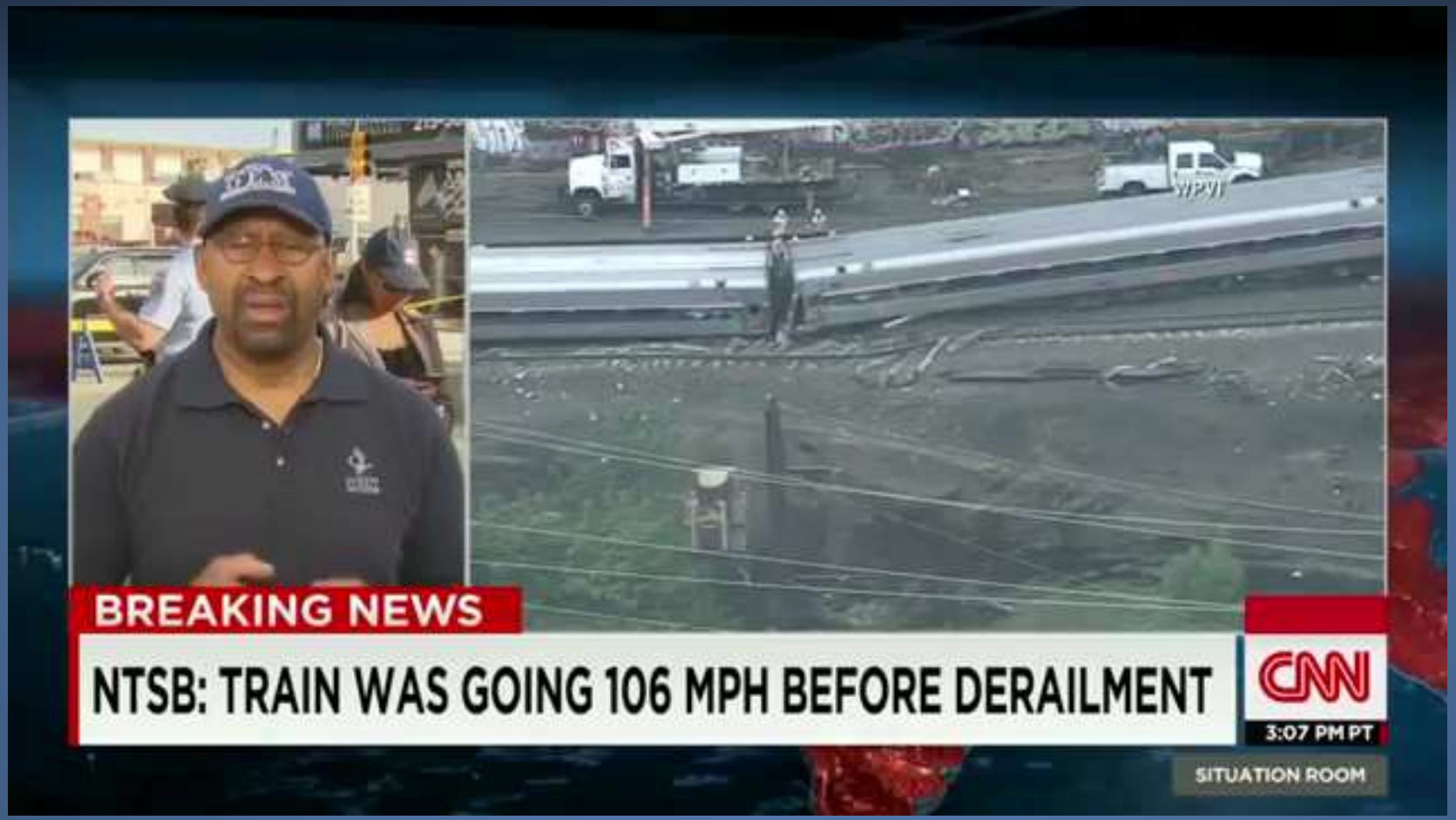
“Stay in your lane”

Don’t talk about things that are outside of your area.

Stay in your lane



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Stay in your lane

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NTSB Official Scolds Philly Mayor's 'Inflammatory' Amtrak Crash Comments

VIDEO 78

by Josh Feldman | 6:48 pm, May 13th, 2015

BREAKING NEWS
NTSB: TRAIN WAS GOING 106 MPH BEFORE DERAILMENT
LIVE
CNN
DOW -7.74
TO BOARD TRAIN
PHILADELPHIA MAYOR SAYS IT'S UNCLEAR HOW MAN
MEDIA

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Crisis Communications Tip

REMEMBER YOUR MESSAGE

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NEW DEVELOPMENTS
NTSB Interviewed Amtrak 188 Engineer
abc
MYSTERY ON THE TRACKS
INSIDE THE AMTRAK INVESTIGATION
TSARNAEV SENTENCED TO DEATH
JEB BUSH'S ROUGH WEEK

The Pivot – your best friend.

- When asked a question that you are not prepared to answer, pivot to your message.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS
NTSB Investigator on Amtrak Crash
abc NEWS
MYSTERY ON THE TRACKS
INSIDE THE AMTRAK INVESTIGATION
SADDAM SENTENCED TO DEATH
JEB BUSH'S ROUGH WEEK

Good Luck!

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summary

DO….

- Take advantage of the resource that NTSB Public Affairs can offer your organization
- Share and coordinate external communications plans with the NTSB
- Be proactive in planning a communications strategy before and during an investigation

summary

DON'T….

- Stray outside the clearly defined communications lanes
- Release investigative information to the media or comment or analyze investigative findings before the Board meeting

contact information

NTSB Public Affairs: 202-314-6100

NTSB Main Number: 202-314-6000

24-hour Communications Center

202-314-6290 (for emergencies)

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