

## PERTAMINA IMAGE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY IN CILACAP REFINERY TANK FIRE

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**

The Burning Of Cilacap  
Refinery,  
Crisis Communication,  
Image Repair Strategies.

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### ABSTRACT

Fuel tank 36 T-120 of Refinery Unit (RU) Cilacap PT Kilang Pertamina Internasional (PT KPI) was burned on Saturday, November 13, 2021. This incident happened all of sudden and unexpected because of thunder strike conjecture (natural factor). Crisis communication was handled to decrease the impacts and repair image. This research used a case study with in-depth interviews, participant observation, and secondary data as data collection methods. PT KPI was not alone at handling the crisis because PT KPI collaborated with local government, local police, and local military. Among five image repair strategies by William Benoit, PT KPI used reducing the offensiveness of the event, mortification, and corrective action strategies. Communication crisis handling of that incident can be seen as best practice when handling crisis caused by natural factors.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Oil fuel tank 36 T-120 Pertamina Cilacap caught fire on Saturday, November 13, 2021, allegedly due to natural factors (Antara Indonesia News Agency, 2021). The incident happened suddenly and unexpectedly. The Pertamina Cilacap refinery is one of the Cilacap Refinery Unit (RU) refineries owned by PT Pertamina International (KPI) Refinery and is located in Cilacap Regency, Central Java. In the issue management phase, the incident immediately entered the crisis stage because it occurred suddenly and unexpectedly. Handling needs to be done quickly and effectively so that the crisis can be passed quickly. The communication of the crisis in the Cilacap fire is interesting to observe, the crisis occurred suddenly and without going through the previous phases of issue management. With the immediate entry into the crisis phase, crisis communication is carried out. Communication is vital in crisis management. Communication is something that can maintain and improve the image of a company that is affected by an issue or incident.

Crisis communication in the fire incident needs to be carried out effectively. Crisis communication can help the public get information about incidents directly from those who experienced the incident. Crisis communication also needs to be carried out to address the impacts arising from the incident. In addition, the company's image also needs to be maintained through crisis communication. The image improvement strategy is carried out through crisis communication carried out by PT KPI. The formulation of the research problem is how the image improvement strategy was carried out by Pertamina in the case of the Pertamina Cilacap refinery tank fire on November 13, 2021. The strategy implemented during the crisis phase will be the focus of this article by briefly discussing the post-crisis phase. Hopefully, this article can add to the treasures of crisis communication studies for both academics and practitioners, especially crises that occur suddenly.

## 2. METHOD

This research method is a case study. A case study is a type of approach in research that examines a case either against an individual or a group in an intensive, in-depth, detailed, and comprehensive manner [1]. A case study is a research design in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, such as a program, activity, activity, process, or one or more individuals. [2]. Stake and Yin found that cases are time and activity bound, and researchers collect information using various data collection procedures over a period of time [2].

Triangulation was used in the data collection of this research. Triangulation is defined as a data collection technique that combines various data collection techniques and existing data sources [3]. The data collection techniques used in this research case study are: In-depth and unstructured interviews (primary data). Participant observation (primary data). Online media (secondary data).

This research focuses on the strategy of the communicator or message maker, in this case is PT KPI. The resource persons for this research were taken from the Communication, Relations, & Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) team of the Cilacap Refinery Unit of PT Kilang Pertamina Internasional, namely:

1. Area Manager Communication, Relations, & CSR RU Cilacap, Cecep Supriyatna
2. RU Cilacap Communication, Relations & CSR Staff, Puji Rahmawati
3. Communication, Relations, & CSR staff at RU Cilacap, King Amil Hamzah.

In addition to the data obtained from these resource persons, the researcher on behalf of Dian Kuswardani also made participatory observations in positions as Communication, Relations, & CSR staff. Usually in-depth interviews are the main tool in qualitative research combined with participatory observation [1]. Benefits of observational data according to MQ Patton [1] is:

- a. Researchers can get a holistic view.
- b. Researchers can use an inductive approach based on direct experience.
- c. Researchers can see things that would not have been revealed in interviews.
- d. Researchers can find things beyond the respondent's perception so that they get a more comprehensive picture.
- e. Researchers can get personal impressions.

This study uses participant observation as a complement to the interviews conducted. Researchers in participant observation have roles as participants and researchers (*observer*) which can observe the lives of individuals or groups in real situations without being systematically controlled or regulated such as experimental research [1]. The participation carried out is complete participation, which is the highest level of involvement where the researcher is fully involved in what the data source is doing [3]

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on participant observation [4] It is known that several steps used by RU Cilacap PT KPI in anticipating fires are to prepare an Emergency Team (TKD) with the following composition:

1. General Manager as Head of TKD
2. HSSE as emergency response team
3. Project Engineer as information team
4. Communication, Relations, & CSR as a communication team
5. The other teams.

When the incident happened, the interview was conducted directly via television media on the day of the incident by the Corporate Secretary of PT KPI, Ifki Sukarya, at the same time the communication team of the Cilacap Refinery Unit also communicated with the local media. [4]. This step causes the news to be directed and not confusing. In addition, on November 15, 2021,

PT KPI also held a press conference with the keynote speaker, the President Director of PT KPI, Djoko Priyono, and the Head of the Central Java Regional Police (Polda), Inspector General Pol. Ahmad Luthfi, who explained the chronology of the fire incident on November 13, 2021, with a provisional assumption that it was caused by a lightning strike[5]. The press conference was a collaboration between PT KPI and the Central Java Regional Police.

The affected communities are also of concern to RU Cilacap, PT KPI. Four villages were affected, namely Kebonmanis, Karangtalun, Lomanis and Mertasinga. For the affected communities, assistance was provided by RU Cilacap in the form of clean water, assistance for shrimp ponds, and food packages.[4].

The following are the results of interviews with informants [6]:

1. Area Manager of Communication, Relations, & CSR at RU Cilacap, Cecep Supriyatna said that this incident is a lesson for all of us to be vigilant under any circumstances. Cecep recognized the role of stakeholders as an important factor in handling crisis communications because all parties greatly assisted RU Cilacap in handling incidents. For example, the Cilacap Resort Police, Cilacap Kodim, and Cilacap Lanal were very helpful in the investigation process, including coordination with the community. Not to forget the role of the Cilacap Regency Government, which was very helpful and communicative when a crisis occurred.
2. RU Cilacap Communication, Relations & CSR staff, Puji Rahmawati said that the active role of RU Cilacap PT KPI so far with the community has played a very important role in resolving crisis communications in the community, especially people affected by this fire incident, making it easier for the team to go into the field to collect data on the impacts. occurred as a result of the incident to the provision of assistance.
3. RU Cilacap Communication, Relations & CSR staff, King Amil Hamzah said that the assistance that had been given to the community, especially through community leaders, was one of the important keys to the success of handling fire incidents. Because it is not only aid that is in the public's spotlight, but other issues are also being discussed in the community. It is through the role of community leaders that issues that are not true can be helped to straighten out.

The incident of the 36 T-120 RU Cilacap tank fire at PT KPI on November 13, 2021 that occurred quickly drew media attention and immediately entered the crisis stage in issue management. After focusing on extinguishing fires, ensuring that the community is in a safe condition, evacuating the community to safer areas, and ensuring that the supply of fuel and LPG to the community is safe and undisturbed, as stated in the Pertamina News Release.[7], Cecep Supriyatna expressed his apologies and will provide compensation in the form of logistical assistance for residents around the Cilacap refinery [8]. As for the post-crisis, The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Pertamina's Refining & Petrochemical Subholding, Djoko Priyono, stated that his party was prepared to repair the lightning rod system, especially at the Cilacap refinery [9]

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the results of the study, it was found that PT KPI's crisis communication was in the crisis phase, namely: Explaining the incident and ensuring there is no operational impact to journalists. Collaborating with stakeholders to deal with the crisis, namely collaboration with the Central Java Police, Cilacap Regency Government, Cilacap Police, Cilacap Kodim, and Cilacap Lanal. Apologize to the public. Responsible for evacuating residents. Provide assistance to the community regarding incidents. Active communication and assistance provided to the community prior to the incident supports crisis communication.

In the communication on the crisis of the RU Cilacap refinery tank fire at PT KPI, there is indeed nothing else that can be done besides implementing a strategy to reduce the incidence and mortification in the crisis phase because of the condition of the fire incident which was highlighted by various media and had an impact on the surrounding community. The two strategies in the form of an apology, ensuring that the community is safe, evacuating the

community, ensuring the supply of fuel and LPG, and providing compensation are the best communication during the crisis phase in the case study of the RU Cilacap refinery tank fire. The crisis communication action was carried out by the Head Office and PT KPI's Cilacap RU in collaboration with the government and the authorities. As for the post-crisis phase, the President Director of PT KPI stated that he would repair the lightning rod system. This action uses a corrective action strategy when the phase has entered the dormant phase. Correction of these actions is not carried out during a crisis because during a crisis what is needed is efforts to extinguish fire, evacuate, apologize, take responsibility, and provide compensation. Correction of actions is carried out after a thorough evaluation is carried out based on the results of the investigation.

In closing, the crisis communication conducted by the Head Office and RU Cilacap PT KPI is a best practice or crisis communication best practice for crises that occur suddenly due to natural factors. Image improvement strategies referring to William Benoit used are strategies to reduce the incidence and mortification during the crisis phase and corrective action strategies during the post-crisis phase. The handling of crisis communication is quite complex considering that there are assets that need to be protected, distribution that needs to be maintained, personnel for handling, communicating and consolidating with stakeholders, as well as reducing the impact on the surroundings.

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