

## Crisis Communications Plan

### University of Washington Office of Media Relations and Communications Updated August 1, 2009

#### **I. Purpose**

This plan provides guidelines for communicating within the university, and from the university to the media and the public, in the event of an emergency, crisis, or incident where there is a need to provide crucial information immediately to the university community.

Disasters, emergencies and crises disrupt the university's normal activities and may require activation of the UW's Emergency Management Plan (<http://www.washington.edu/emergency/ep/>). This Crisis Communications Plan describes the role of Media Relations and Communications and News & Information in communicating vital information to members of the UW community and the public.

This plan is to be flexibly used with emergency decision-making procedures of the university.

Elements should be tested annually in conjunction with campus-wide emergency drills. Appendices should be checked for accuracy and completeness at least annually.

#### **II. Objectives**

1. Determining whether the situation requires invoking this plan.
2. Assembling a Crisis Communications Team to recommend responses.
3. Implementing immediate actions to:
  - a. Identify key constituencies who need to be informed.
  - b. Communicate facts about the situation and minimize rumors.
  - c. Restore a sense of confidence and order.

#### **III. Procedures**

**1. Assessment** – People who become aware of a potential crisis or emergency must contact the Office of Media Relations and Communications. The Associate Vice President or his designee will determine whether it is appropriate to invoke this plan and convene a Crisis Communication Team. If this is done, the Associate Vice President will inform the President and the Vice President of External Affairs, as well as other appropriate university officials.

**2. Crisis Communications Team** – The Crisis Communication Team comprises people whose organizations may play a critical role in addressing the crisis, including representatives of the following:

- Media Relations and Communications
- University Police
- UW Technology
- Human Resources
- Student Life
- Attorney General's Office
- Office of the President
- Facilities
- The affected unit(s)

The above list is not meant to be exhaustive.

Time is of the essence in communicating crucial information to the university community and the news media, and the team will be assembled as quickly as possible. Based on the timing, location, and severity of the incident(s) or event(s), this may occur either in-person or virtually. The Associate Vice President of Media Relations and Communications will determine when a sufficient number of the team is engaged.

Appendix A contains a list of key Crisis Communications Team members and their contact information. For each primary member, there is one alternate.

The Crisis Communications Team will authorize the following:

**3. Spokesperson:** Generally, this is the highest-ranking individual who has direct knowledge of the events or the Associate Vice President of Media Relations and Communications. The individual selected will have the highest credibility and understanding of the events surrounding the crisis. Public information officers may fill in for these individuals if the crisis is prolonged, but they should not be the initial responders to the general public, the media or the university community.

**4. Notifying Key Constituencies:** The Crisis Communications Team will determine which groups need to be informed first. It is important to keep in mind that people will seek – and believe – other sources of information (e.g., news reports, rumors, word of mouth) in the absence of official communication. Effective communication will help quell rumors, maintain morale and ensure public safety. Appendix B contains a description of the communication tools, their possible applications in a crisis, and who can operate those tools.

Key constituencies include:

- Students
- Faculty
- Staff
- Parents of students
- Board of Regents

- Public officials—Governor, Legislators, Mayors
- Alumni
- Neighbors
- General Public
- News Media

**5. Fact sheet:** As soon as possible after the incident, a fact sheet will be prepared to supplement communication with key constituencies and information provided to reporters by the spokespersons. It will be approved by the Associate Vice President and checked for accuracy by those with a direct knowledge of the crisis. Fact sheets released publicly or posted to the Internet must be time stamped and updated as information changes.

**6. Alerting the media:** The Director of News and Information, in consultation with the Associate Vice President, should decide on the best way(s) of reaching the news media. In cases where a crisis is likely to be prolonged and/or especially complex, the director may choose to create a Joint Information Center and/or a news media briefing center to coordinate the information flow and assure that the right people are involved in collecting and disseminating information. Consideration will be given to appropriate media staging locations that can accommodate vehicles such as satellite trucks. Communication with the media must occur frequently, as new information is known. Information from news briefings may be captured in audio and/or video and posted to the Internet, along with updated fact sheets. Effort will be made to monitor news coverage in key media and correct significant inaccuracies, either in those media themselves or in material distributed by the university.

In general, the university will welcome reporters and allow them as much access as public safety and good taste permit. Public information officers will facilitate access to key knowledgeable individuals and respond quickly to as many requests as possible. Communication must occur early and often but be confined to the facts. All information must be conveyed with an eye toward what will be most important to various publics.

#### **IV. Plan Testing and Validation**

This plan shall be updated and tested at least once a year. Full activation of the plan will be incorporated into the UW's annual Emergency Operations Center disaster exercise. Responsibility for updating the Crisis Communications Plan rests with the Associate Vice President of Media Relations and Communications.

#### **V. After-action Report/Review (AAR)**

Within a week of the crisis, the Associate Vice President will convene the Crisis Communications Team for a review of lessons learned. This AAR may be used to provide summary information to a more comprehensive campus-wide AAR coordinated through UW Emergency Management.

## **Attachments**

Appendix A: Crisis Communications Team contact information

Appendix B: Crisis and Mass Communications Tools

## Appendix A: Crisis Communications Team Call-out List

NAME	WORK	CELL/PAGER	HOME	E-MAIL
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### **Media Relations & Communications**

Norm Arkans  
Bob Roseth

### **University Police**

John Vinson  
Ralph Robinson  
Ray Wittmier

### **UW Technology**

Scott Mah  
Andy Ward

### **Web Communications**

Gina Hills  
Jeff Hendrickson

### **Human Resources**

Mindy Kornberg  
Liz Coveney

### **Student Life**

Eric Godfrey  
Lincoln Johnson

### **Facilities**

Charles Kennedy  
John Chapman

**Attorney General's Office**

Jack Johnson

Karin Nyrop

**Office of the President**

Carol Niccolls

**Environmental Health and Safety**

Jude Van Buren

Barbara McPhee

**Crisis Communications Plan**

**Appendix B: Crisis and Mass Communications Tools**

*Note: In a crisis situation no single medium will suffice to notify all constituencies. Depending on the particular situation, some combination of the communication tools listed below may be employed to reach the widest number of people as quickly as possible.*

Communication Tool	Application	Characteristics <i>(characteristics in bold indicate more unique aspects)</i>
<b>UW Web site Banner Postings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UW Homepage</li> <li>• UWIN</li> <li>• MyUW</li> </ul>	Short messages posted as banners on official UW Web sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• Great source of information if UW community knows when and where to check.</li> <li>• Does not provide active notification.</li> <li>• Crisis Communications Team posts information.</li> <li>• <b>Messages are usually less detailed and shorter.</b></li> <li>• <b>Banners are color-coded by the severity of the event.</b></li> </ul>
<b>“UW Alert Site” Web site</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• emergency.washington.edu</li> </ul>	More detailed messages posted on this Web site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• Great source of information if UW community knows when and where to check.</li> <li>• Does not provide active notification.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis Communications Team posts information.</li> <li>• <b>Messages can be as detailed and as long as needed.</b></li> </ul>
<b>UW Information Hotline</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 206-897-INFO(4636)</li> <li>• 1-866-897-INFO(4636)</li> </ul>	Messages recorded on official UW hotline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• Great source of information if UW community knows when and where to check.</li> <li>• Does not provide active notification.</li> <li>• Crisis Communications Team posts information.</li> <li>• <b>Messages are usually less detailed and shorter, but can be manually updated to provide more detail as needed.</b></li> </ul>
<b>UW Alert</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verizon Notification Service (VNS)</li> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• Twitter</li> </ul>	Short messages sent to SMS text, email, and social networking accounts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SMS text message</li> <li>• UW email</li> <li>• Alternate email</li> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• Twitter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• <b>Provides active notification to subscribers (opt-in) of UW Alert.</b></li> <li>• <b>Subscribers need to sign up separately for the Facebook and Twitter capabilities.</b></li> <li>• Crisis Communications Team posts information.</li> <li>• <b>Messages limited to approximately 140 text characters due to SMS text and Twitter limitations.</b></li> </ul>
<b>UW Outdoor Alert</b>	Short messages broadcast to loudspeakers on UW Seattle Campus. UW Tacoma has a separate system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• <b>Provides active notification to people within earshot of the broadcast.</b></li> <li>• Crisis Communication Team broadcasts messages.</li> <li>• <b>Messages are usually less detailed and shorter, but can be customized to provide more detail as needed.</b></li> </ul>

<b>UWTV</b>	Messages displayed on UWTV channel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Process to deploy still in development.</b></li> <li>• Can be used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• <b>Provides active notification to viewers.</b></li> <li>• <b>Messages can be displayed as full screen or scrolls.</b></li> <li>• <b>Crisis Communication Team provides content for the messages, but UWTV staff posts the messages.</b></li> </ul>
<b>UW ListServ Email</b>	Messages sent directly to recipients' email.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• <b>Provides active notification to email. However, recipients may not necessarily be able to read/receive email messages.</b></li> <li>• <b>Examples of recipient groups include building coordinators, deans, chairs, AVPs, directors.</b></li> <li>• <b>Message delivery dependent on network conditions and the number of recipients.</b></li> <li>• <b>Messages can be as detailed and long as needed.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Mass Notification</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verizon Notification Service (VNS)</li> </ul>	Messages sent directly to recipients' multiple devices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office phone</li> <li>• Cell phone</li> <li>• Home phone</li> <li>• Pager</li> <li>• Email</li> <li>• SMS text</li> <li>• Fax</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be used to disseminate official information during emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</li> <li>• <b>Provides active notification to multiple devices.</b></li> <li>• <b>Examples of recipient groups include emergency responders and other targeted groups.</b></li> <li>• <b>Message delivery dependent on network conditions and the number of recipients.</b></li> <li>• <b>Messages are usually less detailed and shorter.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Bulk Email</b>	Email message sent to entire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be used to disseminate official information during</li> </ul>

	campus or large-scale recipient list	<p>emergencies or crisis situations that may disrupt the normal operation of the UW or threaten the health or safety of members of the UW community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provides active notification to email. However, recipients may not necessarily be able to read/receive email messages.</b></li> <li>• <b>Students may not use UW email as their primary address.</b></li> <li>• <b>Message delivery dependent on network conditions and the number of recipients (expect the entire campus list to take at least two hours or more to complete).</b></li> <li>• <b>Messages can be as detailed and long as needed.</b></li> </ul>
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Appendix B: Revised 6/24/09