

Crisis Communications Plan

University of Washington Office of Media Relations and Communications Updated October 2007

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 or crisis.

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/admin/business/oem/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 Executive Director or his designee will determine whether it is appropriate to invoke this plan and convene a Crisis Communication Team. If this is done, the executive director 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
- Computing and Communications
- Human Resources
- Student Life
- Attorney General's Office
- Office of the President
- 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 Executive Director 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 are at least two alternates.

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 Executive Director 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 executive director 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 executive director, 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 Executive Director of Media Relations and Communications.

V. After-action Report/Review (AAR)

Within a week of the crisis, the Executive Director 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	FAX	E-MAIL
<u>Media Relations & Communications</u>			
Norm Arkans	543-2560	543-5651	arkans@u.washington.edu
Bob Roseth	543-2580	685-0658	roseth@u.washington.edu
Gina Hills	543-2561	543-5651	ghills@u.washington.edu
<u>University Police</u>			
Vicky Stormo	543-0521	685-8042	vpeltzer@u.washington.edu
Ralph Robinson	685-2550	685-8042	rrobin@u.washington.edu
Ray Wittmier	616-2114	685-8042	rcop@u.washington.edu
<u>Computing & Communications</u>			
Scott Mah	543-5411	685-6855	scottm@cac.washington.edu
Tammy Stockton	616-5150	221-5107	tammys@u.washington.edu
Andy Ward	221-4522	221-3843	award@u.washington.edu
<u>Human Resources</u>			
Mindy Kornberg	685-4730	616-1081	mindyk@u.washington.edu
Liz Coveney	543-2815	616-1081	econ@u.washington.edu
Bruce Miller	685-2839	616-1081	brucefm@u.washington.edu
<u>Student Life</u>			
Eric Godfrey	543-0128	543-2965	egodfrey@u.washington.edu
Lincoln Johnson	221-6323	685-8749	lj@u.washington.edu
Kathryn Hamilton	543-1240; 616-3271	616-6910	khamilt@u.washington.edu
<u>Attorney General's Office</u>			
Jack Johnson	685-6660	543-0779	jackj@u.washington.edu
Karin Nyrop	685-7234	543-0779	knyrop@u.washington.edu

Quentin Yerxa	685-5372	543-0779	quentiny@u.washington.edu
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Office of the President

Scott Woodward	616-8965	616-1784	dsw@u.washington.edu
Carol Niccolls	543-3083	616-1784	csn@u.washington.edu

**Crisis Communications Plan
Appendix B**

Crisis and Mass Communications Tools

It is important to note in a crisis situation that no single medium will suffice to notify all constituencies. A combination of communications resources will need to be employed to reach the widest number of people as quickly as possible. Depending on the particulars of the situation, some combination of the tools listed below may be employed.

Communication Tool	Application	Characteristics
UW Website Postings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UW Homepage, • UWIN • MyUW • Community Alerts 	Messages posted on “official” UW websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great source of information if UW community knows where to check • Does not provide active notification • UW News and Information staff to post information • Power and internet connectivity dependent.
UW Information Hotline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 206-UWS-INFO • 1-866-UWS-INFO 	Messages recorded on official UW hotline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great source of information if UW community knows where to check • Does not provide active notification • UW Computing & Communications staff to post information
UW Alert	Official information sent via text and email messages to mobile devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides active notification to subscribers (opt-in) to UW Alert • 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 • Is scalable to target campus or primary audience

UW ListServ Email <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Coordinators • Deans, Director, Chairs 	Message sent directly to recipients' email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides active notification • Arrives instantaneously • Recipients may not be near email to receive • Reaches every building and every department
Mass Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MyStateUSA • Verizon Notification System (VNS) • UW Conferencing Blast Dial • UW Avaya "Via" 	Messages created and sent via multiple methods (eg., phone, cell phone, pager, email, SMS, fax) to selected recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides active notification to various communications devices. • Generally does not scale to large groups due to cost and capacity issues.
Bulk Email	Email messages to entire campus or large scale recipient list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides active notification • May take several hours for complete delivery depending on audience and priority of event. • People may not check email on a regular basis. • Students may not use UW email as their primary address.