Crisis Communications Plan

W

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Developed & Approved by the
UW Crisis Communications Team

October 13, 2017

Table of Contents

Key Information at a Glance:

University Emergency Communications

- The University of Washington Crisis Communications Plan provides the general framework for the coordination of communications within the University, and among the University, the media and the public in the event of an emergency or other critical incident.
- The Crisis Communications Team is comprised of individuals who represent key departments and units of the University and who have a critical role in responding and supporting the response to an emergency at the University.
- The UW News Office is the lead communications organization for the University of Washington, both on a daily basis and, is a member of the Crisis Communications Team during major emergencies.
- During an emergency or incident on campus the UW Alert Blog is the primary tool for providing continually updated information to the University Community, the media, and the general public.
- Campus emergency communications tools include a mass notification system (MNS) that allows the Crisis Communication Team to send out SMS (text messages), UW email, social media (Facebook & Twitter), and phone calls. Other tools include the UW Website Banner Postings, UW Alert Blog, the UW Information Hotline (provides a recorded emergency message), UW Indoor Alert, and UW Outdoor Alert (Blue Towers). When using these tools to alert the University community the messages will also include instructions about what to do if applicable.
- Detailed and specific (step-by-step) procedures related to the implementation of this framework are not included in this plan, but are part of each assigned departments' individual documentation process.

Section I: Introduction

In an emergency or other crisis, effective and timely communication helps to protect life, public safety and property, and upholds the long-term integrity of the University of Washington.

Emergency communication are a vital tool during an emergency conditions are essential to preserve the safety and security of the University community. This plan outlines the different warning systems available and suggested use of each system, as well as provides operational guidance for issuing emergency warnings and UW Alerts.

There is no one system that will enable the University to fully warn everyone in a timely manner because each system has limitations. It is imperative to utilize multiple systems to effectively broadcast warning messages to the majority and as many of the University of Washington of students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

All UW Alert messages must be accurate, clear, and consistent. Within the constraints of the available messaging system(s), all messages should include accurate and detailed information about the situation and what actions to take. During the course of the emergency incident, regular updates to the campus community are highly advisable.

The media also aids in the warning dissemination. To assist in maintaining accuracy of the UW Alert messages, the media should receive consistent information with the warning messages themselves. The UW News Office will ensure that the media has access to updated information throughout the emergency incident as necessary to ensure the safety of the University community, first responders and other support personnel responding to the incident.

A. Purpose

The University of Washington's <u>Crisis Communication Plan</u> outlines the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of key UW officials and departments that will guide the University in promptly and accurately sharing information with all of the University's audiences during an emergency or crisis.

This plan is part of the UW's all-hazards <u>Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan</u> (Annex 1), administered by the <u>UW Emergency Management Department</u> (UWEM).

For the purpose of this plan, a crisis is defined as a significant event or incident that disrupts – or has the potential to disrupt -- the University's normal activities and operations. A crisis could be precipitated by emergency or a controversy. An emergency is a fire, earthquake, severe weather, crime or other event that presents a threat and typically involves a response from police, fire, utilities, and/or emergency

medical personnel. A controversy better describes events such as a major protest, march or civil disturbance either by students, faculty, staff, or other persons on/near the UW campus.

This plan is to be flexible in nature and used in conjunction with other emergency decision-making procedures of the University. This plan solely describes the crisis communication roles, responsibilities, and procedures that will be followed by the University's Crisis Communication Team and does *not* address other response and recovery procedures that likely will also be implemented in response to an incident on campus.

Elements of this plan are tested periodically as well as annually in conjunction with campus-wide emergency exercises and drills. All appendices are checked and updated for accuracy and completeness annually. Copies of this plan are posted on the [UWEM Website](#) for public review and comment.

B. Scope

The audience for this plan includes current and potential undergraduates, graduates, and professional school students as well as faculty, staff, alumni, visitors, parents, trustees, neighbors, city and regional leaders, the media, and our Seattle community, national and international publics, and state and federal officials.

This Plan is designed for the entire University of Washington *system.* The UW system includes the UW Medical Center and other UW Medicine-affiliated facilities, the UW Bothell Campus, and the UW Tacoma Campus. Each campus, including the UW Medical Center, is responsible for their own specific procedures. However, this plan will be carried out in close coordination with the UW Medicine, Bothell, and Tacoma emergency management, safety, and security personnel to align messages and operations, promoting effective communications across the entire University of Washington community.

C. Objectives of the Plan

The guiding principle of the University of Washington and the Crisis Communications Team is to communicate incident/event facts as accurately and quickly as possible, updating information regularly as circumstances change, to ensure the safety of the UW community and the continued operation of essential campus and public services.

- To assemble the Crisis Communications Team that will assess, implement, and support the appropriate emergency communications resulting from incident/situation.
- To factually assess situations and determine whether emergency notification communications are warranted and the requisite urgency of the notification(s).
- Implement immediate actions to:
    - o To define the immediate actions needed to inform the campus community about the situation.
    - o Identify all key audiences that need to be notified of the situation.

- o Communicate in an accurate and timely manner about the situation.
- o Monitor all media (broadcast, print, radio, social media, etc...) coverage of the incident/ event and manage rumors.
- o Restore a sense of confidence and/ or order.

The Crisis Communications Team will also meet on a regular basis (frequency determined by the Team members) to conduct business related to the review, implementation and maintenance of this plan. Topics discussed may include review of past actions and activations, developing and presenting strategic and operational priorities for process improvements, and drafting an annual report to senior UW leadership highlighting past activities, challenges and proposed enhancements to the University's crisis communications tools and procedures.   To ensure consistency and administrative continuity, the Crisis Communications Team meetings will be chaired by the Executive Director of UW News and co-chaired by the senior staff member representing UW Information Technology.

Ad-hoc or permanent working groups or subcommittees of the Crisis Communications Team may also be formed to address specific topics or study areas requiring more in-depth review and discussion.   These subcommittees or working groups may involve or invite other UW Departments/units to participate on an as-needed basis to provide technical support or subject matter expertise.

Section II: Concept of Operations

A. Procedures

1. **Convening the Crisis Communications Team**
    Anyone *(including the general campus public) as well as any member of the UW's Crisis Communication Team*) who becomes aware of a potential crisis or emergency that may potentially impact University operations is responsible for notifying key University officials of the incident or event. <u>Any</u> member of the Crisis Communication Team may activate this plan in order to begin the initial group assessment of the incident or event.   Each time the Plan is activated, the Crisis Communications Team member whose department has the lead response incident role, is responsible for notifying the appropriate member(s) of the University's senior leadership team (the President's Cabinet) of the status of the incident and provide ongoing status reports.

    Given the urgency of communicating critical information to the University community and the media, the Crisis Communication Team will be convened 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 through the crisis communication team conference bridge phone system. The initiator of the conference bridge call or the Executive Director of UW News or his/her designee, will determine when a sufficient number of the team have joined the call before discussions commence. A log will be maintained to record the proceedings and activities of each Crisis Communication Team call.

2. **Crisis Communication Team Representatives**
    The UW Crisis Communication Team comprises individuals whose departments and organizations play a critical role in addressing the crisis, including representatives of the following. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive.

    UW Seattle Campus *(in alphabetical order)*
    *   Student Life (including Housing & Food Services)
    *   UW Bothell Campus Liaison
    *   UW Emergency Management Department
    *   UW Information Technology Department
    *   UW Medical Center
    *   UW News Office
    *   UW Police Department
    *   UW Tacoma Campus Liaison
    *   UW Web Communications
    *   *Other unit(s) may participate on the conference call based on the specific incident.*

UW Bothell Campus
- UW Seattle Liaison

UW Tacoma Campus
- UW Seattle Liaison

The Crisis Communications Team, will develop, and regularly-update a list of key Crisis Communication Team members and their 24/7 contact information. Each represented department must have a minimum of three (3) designated and trained individuals to ensure adequate 24/7 coverage. This confidential contact information will be maintained as part of the notification procedures (separate document).

B. Response

1. **Implementation**
   The Crisis Communication Team will implement some, or all of the steps outlined below based on the circumstances, coordinating with all key personnel. Throughout a crisis, the team will meet frequently to review changing facts, assess whether key messages are reaching audiences and determine whether strategies need to change. The success of this plan rests on open and frequent communication among the University of Washington's safety, security, and emergency management leadership, the executive leadership, and the Crisis Communications Team.

2. **Immediate Response**
   Based on the available crisis information and after conducting a situation assessment, the Crisis Communication Team will determine what, if any, public messaging should be sent out. Examples include:
   - Activate the Mass Notification System (text messages, phone calls, emails, social media)
   - Activate the UW Outdoor Alert system (blue towers with loud speakers)
   - Activate the UW Indoor Alert (sirens/loud speakers & reader boards in many buildings)
   - UW Alert Banners on various UW webpages
   - UW Alert Blog
   - UW Information (phone) hotline
   - *… Or any combination of the above.*

   Appendix A contains a description of the communication tools, their possible applications in a crisis, and who can operate those tools.

3. **Notifying Key Audiences**
   The Crisis Communication Team will determine which groups need to be informed first. It is important to keep in mind that people will seek – and trust – other sources of information (e.g. news reports, social media, rumors, and word of mouth) in the absence of official communication. Effective communication will help quell rumors, maintain trust, and ensure public safety.
   Key audiences include:

- Students
- Faculty
- Staff
- Parents of students
- Alumni
- Neighbors
- General Public, including campus Visitors/temporary residents (i.e., summer camps)
- News Media
- Board of Regents
- Public officials – Mayor, Legislators, Governor

4. **Determine Spokesperson(s)**

   This can either be the Senior Director for Media Relations, his/her designed alternate, a senior leader of the University, or a member of the Crisis Communication Team who has knowledge of the crisis will be assigned to provide key messages and emerging facts to the public/media. The individuals selected will have the highest credibility of the University, and additional public information officers can manage briefings, media questions between formal press gatherings.

5. **Developing a Fact Sheet**

   As soon as possible after the incident, a fact sheet will be prepared to supplement communication with key audiences and information provided to the media by the spokesperson. It will be approved by the Senior Director for Media Relations or his/her designee 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 Senior Director for Media Relations will decide on the best way(s) of contacting the news media. In cases where a crisis is likely to be prolonged and/ or especially complex, the Director may open and activate the UW Joint Information Center (JIC) and a news media briefing center to coordinate the information flow and assure that the correct people are involved in collecting and disseminating information. The Media and Communications Room/JIC is the UW's Emergency Operation Center (EOC) located in Suite C-140 of the UW Tower and many act as the central location to coordinate media relations as necessary.

   Consideration will be given to appropriate media stating locations that can accommodate vehicles such as satellite trucks. Communication with the media must occur frequently as new information is known.

7. **Monitor traditional and social media**

   To anticipate any problems in the way information is flowing to the news media and to social media the Crisis Communication Team will have members monitor media and provide a listening report if the incident is anticipated to be of a longer duration than a normal work day. Additional resources may be available to assist in monitoring of media by request (e.g. virtual operations support team (VOST)).

8. **Approval of outgoing Information**
   Typically, we use a collegial approach of multiple approvals before we distribute communications pieces, including emails and news releases. That system will not work in a crisis. Seconds matter in a crisis, and we will be judged by how quickly we share information with key audiences.

   As a matter of policy, the University of Washington is committed to trying to meet these expectations. It recognizes the need for unusually crisp decision-making during a crisis to enable rapid, accurate communication in coordination with the institution's broader process. The Crisis Communications Team have developed templates that have been approved in advance to expedite the approval process during a crisis. Final approval for all communications – for the University rests with the Senior Director of Media Relations and Communications or his or her designee.

9. **The End of the Crisis and After-Action Report**
   The Crisis Communications Team will determine when an incident has ended and provide an "All Clear" message to the key audiences and routine communications processes can resume.

   Within one week of the crisis, the Senior Director for Media Relations or the UW department that took the lead operational role in the response will convene the Crisis Communications Team for a formal review of lessons learned and suggested improvements. This discussion will result in UW Emergency Management developing a formal after-action report that will be shared with the Crisis Communication Team and other University leadership as necessary.

C. Education and Plan Maintenance

1. **Education and Testing**
   It is the responsibility of all the Crisis Communications Team members to provide education to our University community about how and when members would get messages from UW Alert in an emergency. The procedure may be similar to those used to education the University community in emergency preparedness and other safety presentations. The University will also conduct at least one test annually of the UW Alert mass notification system tools, which included the siren/ public address system, email, text messaging, phone call, UW Alert Blog, and UW Alert website banner(s).

2. **Updating the Plan**
   This plan shall be updated at least annually and a number of items contained in the appendices will be updated twice a year.

   The Chair of the Crisis Communication Team in coordination with the Plans, Training, & Exercise Manager from UW Emergency Management will update this plan and have a review from the Crisis Communication Team. Information Technology, will oversee updates and improvements to the distribution lists located within the mass notification system.

Appendix A: Crisis and Mass Communication 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
UW Website Banner Postings • UW Homepage • MyUW • *(various UW Departments who opted to include U-wide emergency banner postings on their respective homepages)*	Short messages posted as banners on official UW Web sites	• 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. • Great source of information if UW community knows when and where to check. • Does not provide active notification. • Crisis Communications Team posts information. • Messages are usually less detailed and shorter. • Banners are color-coded by the severity of the event.
"UW Alert Blog" website • alert.uw.edu	More detailed messages posted on this website	• 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. • Great source of information if UW community knows when and where to check. • Does not provide active notification. • Crisis Communications Team posts information. • Messages can be as detailed and as long as needed.
UW Information Hotline • 206-897-INFO (4636) • 1-866-897-INFO (4636)	Messages recorded on official UW hotline.	• 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. • Great source of information if UW community knows when and where to check. • Does not provide active notification. • By default, the content of messages is automatically taken from the UW Alert Blog website, but can be manually updated as needed. • Messages are usually less detailed and shorter, but can be manually updated to provide more detail as needed.

Communication Tool	Application	Characteristics
UW Alert • e2Campus (service provider for the mass notification system) • Facebook • Twitter	Short messages sent to SMS text, email, and social networking accounts. • SMS text message • UW email • Alternate email • Facebook • Twitter	• 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. • Provides active notification to subscribers of UW Alert. All student email addresses are automatically enrolled. Faculty and staff must "opt-in" to receive UW Alerts. • Subscribers need to sign up separately for the Facebook and Twitter capabilities. • Crisis Communications Team posts information. • Messages limited to approximately 140 text characters due to SMS text and Twitter limitations**.**
UW Indoor Alert	Short messages broadcast to loudspeakers inside select (not) all UW Seattle campus buildings and structures. Some buildings have LED reader boards in place of loudspeakers. UW Bothell and UW Tacoma have separate systems.	• 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. • Messages sent using the mass notification capabilities of the fire alarm system inside buildings. Full broadcast capabilities available in approximately 100 buildings. Paging in common areas or reader boards available in approximately 45 buildings. • Provides active notification to people within earshot of the broadcast. • Crisis Communication Team broadcasts messages. • Messages are usually less detailed and shorter, but can be customized to provide more detail as needed.
UW Outdoor Alert	Short messages broadcast to loudspeakers on UW Seattle Campus. UW Bothell and UW Tacoma have separate systems.	• 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. • Provides active notification to people within earshot of the broadcast. • Crisis Communication Team broadcasts messages. • Messages are usually less detailed and shorter, but can be customized to provide more detail as needed.

Communication Tool	Application	Characteristics
UW ListServ Email	Messages sent directly to recipients' email.	• 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. • Provides active notification to email. However, recipients may not necessarily be able to read/receive email messages. • Examples of recipient groups include building coordinators, deans, chairs, AVPs, directors. • Message delivery dependent on network conditions and the number of recipients. • Messages can be as detailed and long as needed.
Bulk Email	Email message sent to entire campus or large-scale recipient list	• 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. • Provides active notification to email. However, recipients may not necessarily be able to read/receive email messages. • 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). • Messages can be as detailed and long as needed.

Record of Changes

Change Number	Date of Change	Description of Change	Change Made By: