

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN  
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY-PULLMAN  
UNIVERSITY RELATIONS AND OFFICE OF EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT

June, 2008

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.

Issues that require the activation of this plan may also require activation of the WSU Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan which can be found at the link on this page: <http://oem.wsu.edu/Planning>

This Crisis Communications Plan describes the role of WSU Internal Communications, WSU News Service, and the Office of Emergency Management in communicating vital information to members of the WSU university community as well as key stakeholders such as the parents of students, alumni and the public.

This plan is an integral part of emergency response for the University and should be used to guide emergency decision-making as appropriate.

As with any plan, the elements of this plan should be reviewed and tested regularly in conjunction with all-campus emergency drills and exercises. All elements of the plan must be reviewed regularly for continued accuracy.

II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS PLAN

GOAL: Timely determination if the incident or emergency situation requires invoking this plan.

OBJECTIVES: 1. Decision made by Crisis Communication Team to release warning and notification  
2. If delay of warning/notification release will have life-safety implications, pre-approval for authorized personnel to release initial message without Senior staff decision

GOAL: Provide timely and accurate warning and notification to the University Community of any known danger or threat that could affect their safety and well-being.

OBJECTIVES: 1. Activation of appropriate communication resources quickly and efficiently;  
2. Provide clear directions on what people need to do in response to the

- emergency situation;
3. Identify who needs to be informed
  4. Communicate facts about the situation and minimize rumors

GOAL: Demonstrate clearly that WSU is on top of the issue, is managing it appropriately and is providing for the needs of those in the University Community affected by the incident.

OBJECTIVES: 1. Restore a sense of confidence and order within the University  
2. Clearly demonstrate the University leadership is addressing the needs of the University Community

### III. PROCEDURES

1. Activation – WSU Response Units will inform the Emergency Operations Director (EOD) of a potential crisis or emergency that is affecting or may affect WSU-Pullman. The EOD will determine if the incident rises to ICS Type 4, 3, or 2 status and will inform the President and VP of Business and Finance as appropriate. At their discretion other **VP's may be activated including the VP of University Relations. The EOD will inform** appropriate members of the Emergency Operations Team (EOT) including the Emergency Management Coordinator; the WSU Internal Communications Representative and the WSU News Service Representative to institute appropriate crisis communications procedures.

NOTE: In an incident that could affect the immediate life-safety of any member or members of the University Community, any of the following personnel (or their designated alternate) can activate immediate crisis communications resources (Campus Outdoor Warning System[COWS];WSU Crisis Communication System[CCS]; ALERT email, etc.) to provide rapid warning and notification without additional authorization or approval:

- President
- VP of Business and Finance
- VP of University Relations
- VP of Student Affairs, Equity and Diversity
- Emergency Operations Director
- Chief of Police
- Emergency Management Coordinator

If a life-safety activation of communication resources takes place, the EOD must be informed immediately.

2. Crisis Communications Team – The primary Crisis Communication Team comprises the President, the VP of Business and Finance and the VP of University Relations. As needed they will seek additional input regarding emergency communications from any or all of the following:

- Emergency Operations Director
- University Relations, Internal Communications and WSU News Service staff
- Emergency Management Coordinator
- WSU Police Chief or Senior Duty Officer
- Attorney General's Office
- Student Affairs, Equity and Diversity staff
- Residence Life/Center for Fraternity/Sorority Life Staff )

Or other University Offices/Personnel as needed.

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 President (or designated alternate) will determine when a sufficient number of the team is engaged.

See the Confidential Emergency Notification List for the current listing of these key personnel and their contact information.

The Crisis Communications Team will authorize the following:

3. Spokesperson: Generally, this is the highest-ranking individual who has direct knowledge of the events, preferably the President. The individual selected will have the highest credibility and understanding of the events surrounding the crisis. The Public Information Officer (WSU News Service Director) 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 A contains a description of the communication tools and their possible applications.

Key constituencies include:

- Students
- Faculty/ Staff
- Parents of students
- Board of Regents
- State and Local Government-**Governor's Office**, City and County Officials
- University of Idaho
- Alumni
- Pullman Community/Whitman County
- 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 Crisis Communication Team 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 the WSU News Service, 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 (JIC) 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 WSU annual Emergency Operations Center exercise. Responsibility for updating the Crisis Communications Plan rests with the VP of University Relations.

#### V. AFTER ACTION REPORT (AAR)

Within a week of the crisis, the VP of University Relations will convene University Relations and Emergency Management staff for a review of lessons learned. This AAR may be used to provide summary information to a more comprehensive campus-wide AAR coordinated through the Office of Emergency Management.