



CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

Available online at www.uaf.edu/univrel/crisisplan

If you have a medical emergency or other emergency call 911.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid release of accurate information regarding an accident, incident, natural disaster, emergency or controversial issue is clearly in the best interest of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The UAF Crisis Communication Plan (CCP) plan does not change the way emergencies are initially reported at UAF. All emergencies on the Fairbanks campus and at UAF-owned and -operated facilities within the Fairbanks area should be reported immediately to the UAF Emergency Communication Center (police and fire dispatch center) at 907-474-7721.

Emergencies can occur at any time and without warning. Careful planning with an emphasis on safety will assist UAF community members in responding appropriately to crises and emergencies. Each department should have a plan for dealing with an emergency. This plan addresses media relations and communications issues and is an adjunct to the UAF Emergency Operations Plan, available online at www.uaf.edu/safety/EOP.doc.

The goal of UAF's CCP is to provide accurate information and visible leadership in a timely fashion. Without prescribed communication protocols in place, potentially damaging issues can negatively affect the institution's long-term image, credibility and public relations.

The following plan establishes communications protocols to ensure that campus officials and communicators are familiar with both procedures and their specific roles. Details and exact procedures to be followed at branch campuses, and at other sites, should be developed and practiced locally. This plan is designed for internal use and is not intended to establish any standard of care enforceable by third parties.

I. BOARD OF REGENTS POLICY

- A. The University of Alaska requires each of its major administrative units (MAUs) to develop crisis response, communications and business continuation plans. Such plans must include provisions for prompt and effective response to disasters, whether natural or human-made, to protect life and property, and to provide for the continuation of university programs and services during the period impacted by the crisis. (Crisis Planning P02.05.010)
- B. The University of Alaska system responds quickly, accurately, and fully to requests for information about any crisis that affects the system, its employees, its property, its students and its public image, within the constraints imposed by concern for individual privacy and legal responsibility. (Crisis Communications P02.05.020)

II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF UAF ADMINISTRATION

- A. It is the intent of the University of Alaska Fairbanks to provide employees, students, the media and the public with the facts concerning a crisis as information becomes available.
- B. The University Relations director, UAF chancellor, UAF police chief and the senior student affairs officer or their designees will direct response at the first level of a crisis. As soon as one member of this first response team is alerted to a crisis incident, he/she will contact other members of the team and the UA president.
- C. Depending on the nature of the incident, the UAF chancellor or designee may convene all or some of the chancellor's cabinet to assist in assessment and response to the crisis.
- D. Critical, on-call personnel or crisis team members will be identified in each unit before a crisis occurs. Emergency contact information will be updated and distributed regularly. In the event of a crisis, a response team may be assembled from several units to assess and respond to the crisis.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAFF AND FACULTY

- A. Deans and directors should **plan and conduct crisis communication workshops** prior to an emergency. Prepare for crises by holding simulation exercises; include students, chancellor's cabinet, deans, directors and local emergency response units.
- B. **Identify issues, programs or activities**, and prepare fact sheets before an incident occurs whenever possible, or at least as soon as possible after an issue unfolds.

All employees should be familiar with the following:

- a. Your building's emergency exits and evacuation routes.
- b. Your department's designated meeting area in the event of a building evacuation.
- c. Your unit's emergency operation plan and emergency contact information.
- d. UAF's Emergency Operation Plan www.uaf.edu/safety/EOP.doc.
- e. UAF's Crisis Communication Plan www.uaf.edu/univrel/crisisplan/.

Faculty and staff members are expected to remain with their classes or departments and maintain classes or units unless specifically instructed otherwise by emergency personnel. If you have a **medical emergency or other emergency call 911**.

In case of a building evacuation, keep the class or unit together and go to your designated area. In the event of a campuswide incident, the first-level response team, as identified in paragraph II.B. will assess the situation for appropriate responses.

Emergency weather closures

As a residential campus it's imperative that every effort be made to keep the university open and operating. Therefore, it's unlikely the Fairbanks campus would ever be completely closed due to weather conditions. The decision to cancel classes, advise employees to stay at home, postpone or cancel university activities and major events is made only by the chancellor or designee. If individual faculty members are unable to hold classes, it's the responsibility of the faculty member to notify the dean's office or department chair as soon as possible so that the department's emergency communication plan can be implemented and students notified.

Given our unique northern environment, natural events like earthquakes and extreme weather conditions can and do occur. Supervisors will grant administrative leave to employees who miss work because of inclement weather or if working conditions are such that employees are unable to stay at work or come to work. Administrative leave must be coordinated through the employee's supervisor and is at the discretion of the supervisor.

Weather-related closures or other emergency information will be initially disseminated via one or more of the following methods:

- a. Chancellor's e-mail listserv, UAF-L
- b. Nanook Emergency information telephone line at 474-7UAF(7823)
- c. Online newsroom www.uaf.edu/news/
- d. News subscription service e-mail listserv, UAFNEWS-L
- e. Fax or e-mail to departments and rural campuses

If an emergency affects university computer and phone lines, students, staff, and faculty are advised to tune in to local radio and television news broadcasts for information.

IV. CRITICAL PROMPT ACTIONS NEEDED

Proper response demands prompt action and sound judgment. The general procedures that apply to all employees are as follows:

- A. **Notify the University Relations director or designee** who will assess the situation, notify the first response team and the statewide director of public affairs and, if necessary, facilitate the preparation of official statements, rumor control centers, emergency plan implementation and media centers.

Assess the situation to determine what has happened. Given the type of incident—accident, natural disaster, extreme weather condition, crime, etc., the following situations warrant consideration:

1. Has anybody died or is it likely that death will occur because of the incident?
2. Are health and safety affected?
3. Is wrongdoing implied?
4. Are there apparent violations of statutes, policies or regulations?
5. Is there potential for adverse reaction by students, employees or organized labor?
6. Are there questions about the institution's operations?
7. Is there potential litigation associated with the incident?
8. Are the statewide, regional or national media interested?
9. Has the institution's reputation been damaged?
10. Consider how many similar incidents have occurred previously—is there a pattern?

- B. **Notify your supervisor** to determine if your unit-level emergency response plan should be implemented.
- C. **Identify key constituencies.** Whenever possible, appropriate details and actions taken by the university during an emergency should be provided to students, staff and faculty first. Information should also be provided as soon as possible to units that may receive calls from the public. Unit level constituents should be identified along with a method to contact those constituents prior to a crisis and may include:
 - 1. students, employees and families
 - 2. parents of students
 - 3. board of regents/university system president/UA administration
 - 4. alumni, friends and community leaders
 - 5. representatives of targeted audiences
 - 6. the media

V. **RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

The release of any institutional information is coordinated with University Relations. University Relations should consult General Counsel prior to releasing information, where potential claims may be raised. There are many considerations including the time, place and manner in which information is released. A statement should be issued to media as soon as possible considering all circumstances. The statement should be brief and issued by the appropriate official, which is typically the University Relations director unless otherwise designated. All information should be released by the designated spokesperson(s) as defined by the first-level response team. All questions should be referred to this person. A single person releasing information will ensure consistency and accuracy in reporting the facts.

- A. The University Relations director or designee will be responsible for the coordination of the release of institutional information and communications, including official statements from appropriate university individuals. At a remote or off-campus site, every effort will be made to use the local managers with the full assistance of the University Relations office on the Fairbanks campus.
- B. The objectives are:
 - 1. Ensure timely release of accurate information.
 - 2. Communicate verified **facts** rather than speculative information.
 - 3. Facilitate the flow of information.
 - 4. Promote and protect the welfare of involved personnel and their families.
 - 5. Retain employee, student, public and news media confidence in the institution.
 - 6. Use a crisis, when appropriate, to educate the public on broader issues raised by the crisis: how we'll prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future; what programs we have in place and what we're doing now.

- C. Information that is speculative and **should not be released**:
 1. Estimates concerning the extent of damage in dollars cannot be accurate during the first hours of an emergency and are best released later when verified.
 2. Estimates concerning the length of time it will take to put a damaged facility back on line.
 3. Speculation on cause and blame placed on any individual, agency or piece of equipment.
 4. Estimates of original costs.
 5. Comments on judicial or administrative processes in which findings have not been issued.

VI. OTHER PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- A. **The need for a public fact/media center** should be assessed by the first response team or University Relations director or designee immediately and if deemed necessary, made accessible and set up as soon as possible. University Relations has a list of possible sites.
- B. **Attention to relief and basic human needs** (first aid, shelter, drinking water, etc.) comes before problems of material salvage and building maintenance. UAF's Emergency Operations Plan addresses specifics.
- C. **Top officials must have accurate information** and be available to talk to employees, students, friends and neighbors to provide UAF services as needed, and facts as required.
- D. **Media should be monitored** by assigned information officers during a crisis to ensure accuracy of information and timely corrections made as needed.
- E. **Financial relief** - board of regents/legal counsel consideration will be required in some cases to:
 1. Pay families of deceased.
 2. Pay insurance benefits.
 3. Pay for transportation of body (bodies).
 4. Allow students to telephone families at no cost.
 5. Provide free alternate housing for affected students.

VII. POST-EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

1. Assess handling of the initial response to the crisis.
2. Assess the need for post-traumatic counseling for employees or students who assisted in response to the crisis.
3. Provide updates to audiences.
4. Evaluate policies and procedures in light of the crisis plan, including UA Board of Regents policies.
5. Evaluate the handling of the crisis.
6. Revise procedures.
7. Test the new, corrected system.
8. Thank all who helped during the crisis.
9. Educate public(s) about broader issues raised by crisis.

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