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Introduction

The underlying principle in any crisis, including emergencies and disasters, is to responsibly communicate relevant information to key audiences. The message should avoid over-reassuring the recipient about the nature or impact of the situation while at the same time, giving the recipient an accurate description of the hazard and guidance on how to protect themselves.

Effective communications strategies, both internal and external, are key to successful crisis management. The University’s primary message is always that our first concern is for our students, faculty, staff, alumni, partners and participants in our programs.

Millersville University’s Crisis Communications Plan provides procedures for notifying appropriate personnel in the event of a crisis, emergency or disaster situation and outlines policies to determine messages for internal and external audiences.

Definitions

Crises: A crisis situation is defined as an event or an issue that threatens to create an unusually high level of harshly negative media coverage and external criticism. It requires a quick, authoritative and reliable response to reduce the chance of harm to the institution’s reputation and its resources. There are many examples of what constitutes a crisis, including, but not limited to:

- Severe acts of vandalism
- A computer-related security breach involving the possible revelation of Social Security numbers
- A foodborne illness outbreak in a dining hall
- A sudden impending threat to important funding sources
- Negative social media situation
- Volatile personnel situation

Emergencies: An emergency is defined as a serious, unexpected and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action. In these situations, personnel should first contact the appropriate emergency authorities. Once officials have been able to assess the situation and have determined the severity of the emergency and safety of those on campus, Millersville University’s Crisis Communications Plan should be put into effect. Examples of emergencies include, but are not limited to:

- Fire
- Flooding of streets and buildings on campus

- Violent crime
- Fatality
- Chemical spill or other accidental release of a toxin

Disasters: A disaster is a sudden, calamitous event that seriously disrupts the functioning of campus and causes human, material and economic or environmental losses that exceed the University’s ability to cope using its own resources. Though often caused by nature, disasters can have human origins. Examples of disasters include, but are not limited to:

- Severe damage from a tornado
- Extensive damage from fire or flooding to multiple buildings
- Interruption of business due to pandemic illness

In many cases there is overlap between a crisis, emergency and disaster depending on the timing and duration of the events. Examples that have historically impacted Millersville University include, but are not limited to:

- Active shooter
- Anthrax and other biological agents (suspicious packages or letters)
- Bomb threat
- Communicable disease, e.g., Ebola, medical emergencies, pandemic
- Death or fatality
- Demonstrations (civil disturbances)
- Explosion on or near campus
- Faculty/staff accused of child pornography/child molestation/child abuse
- Fire
- Hazardous material release
- Hazardous weather
- Severe cutback in state budget
- Sexual assault
- Theft – faculty/staff steals significant amount of money from University
- Threat detection – Threat Assessment Team
- Utility failure
- Violent or criminal behavior

These emergencies are covered extensively in the full Millersville University Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The EOP is discussed in Appendix A: Emergency Operations Plan.
MILLERSVILLE Crisis Communication Policies

At the onset of a crisis, emergency or disaster situation, the University will put this Crisis Communications Plan into effect by making the appropriate initial contacts and following through with the plan’s communications strategy.

Only designated spokespeople for each situation will communicate with the media, under the guidance of University Communications.

Key objectives are to demonstrate the University’s responsibility to our students, faculty, staff and the public; maintain and strengthen our reputation and relationships with alumni, friends, partners and the communities we serve; and protect Millersville University’s name and reputation.
Crisis Communication Action Steps - Taken at the onset of a crisis

**Step 1:** Implement Millersville Call Tree  
**See Appendix B:** Millersville Call Tree, for names and numbers.

The Incident Commander should immediately contact their Vice President to provide details of the situation.  
That Vice President in turn, needs to immediately contact the President. If the President doesn’t answer, a message should be left and if an acting President has been appointed, then the acting President should be called.  
The Incident Commander and/or Vice President aware of the situation should then contact the director of University Communications.  
In certain situations, other personnel may be contacted (to be determined by the President, Vice President and Incident Commander).

**Step 2:** Determine if the event is a crisis, emergency or disaster and follow guidelines in this document as well as in the EOP for the specific event.  
This should be determined by the Incident Commander with input from the President.

**Step 3:** Implement communications response

Roles normally include:

- **Lead communicator:** Coordinates all aspects of communication about the crisis for internal and external audiences, with guidance from the President and Incident Commander.
- **Primary spokesperson:** Assists in crafting and implementing external/internal message; oversees implementation of the media strategy; maintains an open dialogue with the media; and coordinates communications to additional audiences. See Appendix C: Spokesperson Guidelines.
- **Writer:** Responsible for drafting and distributing messages for internal and external audiences, including social media. See Appendix D: Social Media Guidelines.
- **Others:** In addition, web content specialists, photographers, videographers and others may need to assist with getting the message out to internal and external audiences.

In an emergency or disaster, the Director of Communications will also serve as Public Information Officer (PIO) as defined by the Incident Command System (ICS) in the MU EOP.

Determine key messages/talking points, deadlines

To frame the response, those involved, see **Appendix B:** Millersville Call Tree, need to answer these questions:

1. What was the nature of the event, what happened?
2. Who was involved and affected?
3. When did it happen?
4. Where did it happen?
5. How did it happen?
6. If it is known, why it happened – this may not be able to be answered initially.
7. Which safety/government agencies are involved (if any)?
8. What type of follow-up is necessary?
9. What are the most important objectives in managing this crisis? – See Appendix E: Crisis Communications Objectives.

Messages normally include:

1. A statement to distribute to media or a prepared statement to have on hand in case of a media inquiry.
2. Statements for key publics (e.g., students, parents, supporters, neighbors, legislators and internal audiences).
3. Messages to be shared on social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter).
4. Messages to be sent through MU Alert.

When necessary, pre-prepared initial statements, see Appendix F: Generic Holding Statements and Talking Points, may be used until more information is gathered and strategic messages are prepared.

Identify audiences

Audiences normally include:
- Participants/those involved in situation
- Students, Faculty and Staff
- Media
- Alumni
- Elected officials
- Strategic partners, such as Borough residents
- Public

Identify tasks and timelines

The team will identify the tasks to be completed, who is responsible for completing them, and when they will be completed. Appendix G: Crisis Communications Task Log, may be helpful in completing this step.

Deadlines will be determined according to the situation. In crisis situations, a speedy public response (within two hours) often is warranted.

All crises require the notification of the President's office. See Appendix H: University-Level Notification and Resources.
Appendix A: Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

In the event of a campus emergency or disaster, this plan will be utilized as part of the overall Incident Command System (ICS) of the MU Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

The MU ICS for an emergency or a disaster is:

Incident Commander (Emergency Coordinator) – University Police Chief or designee

Safety Officer – Director of Environmental Health and Safety or designee

Public Information Officer – Director of Communications or designee

Liaison Officer – University Police Officer or designee
Appendix B: Millersville University's Call Tree

**President:** Dr. John M. Anderson  
Campus, 871-7001; direct campus 871-7001

**Vice President of Advancement:** Dr. Aminta H. Breaux  
Campus, 871-7500; direct campus, 871-7500

**Vice President of Finance and Administration:** Roger V. Bruszewski  
Campus, 871-4087; direct campus, 871-4087

**Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management:** Brian Hazlett  
Campus, 871-5714; direct campus 871-5710

**Executive Deputy to the President:** Vacant  
Campus, 871-5955; direct campus, 871-5953

**Provost:** Dr. Vilas A. Prabhu  
Campus, 871-7555; direct campus, 871-7555

**Police Chief:** Peter Anders  
Campus, 871-4357; direct campus, 871-5972

**Director of Safety and Environmental Health:** Patrick Weidinger  
Campus, 871-4950, direct campus 871-4240

**Director of Communications:** Janet E. Kacskos  
Campus, 871-7870; direct campus, 871-7870
Appendix C: Spokesperson Guidelines

Overall Guidelines:
- Always defer to civil authorities when asked by the media about events such as fires, accidental death, possible criminal activity, injuries, etc. (When in doubt, discuss with legal before commenting).
- Address the response and not the cause.
- Place most important messages at the beginning of a response.
- Be concise.
- Respond with simple answers.
- Do not respond to hypothetical questions. Bridge back to reality.
- Avoid negatives. Be positive.
- It’s okay to say, “I don’t know.”
- There’s no such thing as “off the record.”
- Stop talking when you feel you have answered the question and don’t be baited by silences.
- Learn to bridge to your key messages. (“Well, I can’t address that question, but what I can tell you is...”).
- Use flagging to underscore the importance of a forthcoming comment. (“I think what’s most important to remember is this: ...”).

Sample redirect/bridging statements:
- “I can’t really address that, but what I can tell you is...”
- “What’s really important is...”
- “I’m not sure where you’re going with that, but something I’d like your audience to know is...”
- “The larger question is...”
- “Our first concern is always...”
- “The real issue is...”
- “It’s important to point out...”
- “Let’s not lose sight of...”
- “From a broader perspective...”
Appendix D: Social Media Guidelines

SOCIAL MEDIA IN A CRISIS:
Millersville University's social media tools can be useful in disseminating important information to large numbers of individuals, almost instantaneously. Facebook and Twitter are the main tools which can be used. They can also be used to see what others are saying about the crisis. The University may be able to correct dangerous misinformation and rumors and also gather information from people who are in close physical proximity to the crisis.

Not all crises will warrant a social media presence. Millersville University's social media channels are an important tool for shaping the University's brand and care must be taken to determine whether an announcement is warranted. Any posting during a crisis, disaster or emergency must be approved by the Director of Communications.

FACEBOOK: Primary administrator is Director of Communications.

1. Post information briefly explaining the situation and tell followers where they can get the most up-to-date information from the school.
2. Post status updates if there is any new and/or important information.
3. Watch comments for information and misinformation; pass along pertinent information to Incident Commander and respond if necessary (e.g., to correct inaccurate info).

TWITTER: Primary administrator is Director of Communications.

1. If information is in excess of 140 characters, posts are abbreviated and linked back to Facebook.
2. Consider asking followers to "Please retweet" so the information is distributed.
3. Ask University members with Twitter accounts to retweet.
4. Search Twitter for individuals writing about the crisis.
Appendix E: Crisis Communications Objectives

While general messages will vary from one crisis to another, the communication objectives remain fairly constant. The objectives are the desired results of any communication crisis response. The effective management of the general messages will help Millersville University reach these objectives.

The overall objectives of the communication crisis plan are:

- Demonstrate Millersville University’s responsibility to its students, faculty and staff.
- Maintain and enhance the University’s reputation with its alumni and friends of the University.
- Maintain and enhance the University’s reputation with the communities it serves.

These strategic objectives will be prioritized for each listed crisis, and supporting tactical responses will be developed and implemented by University Communications for each individual crisis. A rapid response to all constituencies is the established tactic.
Appendix F: Generic Holding Statements and Talking Points*

To be used for news media in first hours after an incident before all information is gathered

**Generic:**
“We are deeply concerned about the (incident description) that took place (time and location). Our first priority is for the safety and well-being of (our students/faculty/employees). We are currently working with (agency/agencies) to learn more about this incident, and we will communicate more information as it becomes available.”

For situations involving inappropriate behavior by faculty/staff:
“Millersville University is aware of the situation involving (insert name) (insert affiliation with University), and we share the concern expressed within the community. It is University policy that we do not discuss specific disciplinary matters regarding employees; however, we have taken appropriate action. Please contact (appropriate investigating authority) with specific questions.”

**Injuries:**
“We understand that (number or descriptor) individuals have been injured and are being treated at/transported to (medical facility). Until we have more information, we will defer to (agency) for information on the condition of those injured.”

**Fatalities:**
(Note: In most situations, University Communications will take the lead on communications in situations involving fatalities):
“We are deeply saddened by this terrible event and mourn the loss of (number) members of the Millersville family. Out of respect for the families, we are unable to add any information to what the (agency) has confirmed publicly. Our concern is for our students/employees/faculty at this time.”

*Notes:
Additional information on managing the communication related to a fatality is in the Family Assistance Center portion of MU’s EOP.

**Preserving the confidentiality of information in a crisis situation:**
Although Millersville University is a public institution and subject to the Pennsylvania Public Records Act, certain information by law must generally be kept private, even in a crisis situation. The information includes personally identifiable information (other than directory information). Social security numbers, M numbers, home addresses, phone numbers and medical information should not be shared.
Appendix G: Crisis Communications Task Log

Date ______ Incident description ________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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Appendix H: University-Level Notification and Resources

The effective management of risk requires that significant events are reported quickly and accurately to the University’s senior leadership. In conjunction with the University’s risk management and emergency management programs, a rapid notification protocol has been established to ensure the President and his leadership team is appropriately informed.

Notification of the President and other officials:
The President is the senior University administrative official. Therefore, it is critical that he/she be kept informed. That responsibility rests with the Vice Presidents and with the President’s staff.

The President will decide how best to inform the Chancellor and COT.

The following events should trigger automatic notification of the President:

- Homicide
- Sexual assault
- Armed robbery
- Terrorist or suspected terrorist incident
- Events resulting in extreme property damage or excessive interruption of campus operations
- Major accident or building evacuation
- Warning of a major weather emergency
- Major fire or environmental threat
- Recommended closing for any reason
- Death of a University employee or student on campus
- Arrest of a University employee or student on campus
- Severe data breech
- Demonstrations
- Threats, including bomb threats
- Public health problem
- Regulatory mandated reporting that involves research, public safety or could result in significant fines or sanctions

In all cases, the reporting Vice President should also notify these offices:

- Provost
- University Communications
- Other Vice Presidents should be contacted as appropriate. For example, contact the Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management on anything involving a student.
Protocol for Notification of Vice Presidents and Equivalents

It is the responsibility of key managers in various units to notify their respective Vice Presidents of significant events that may reach the level of reporting under these guidelines. Within each Cabinet area, a protocol shall be in place to notify the respective Vice President from within the school or division.

To assist with the notification of the President, the Emergency Management Team will maintain a current listing of all members of the President’s Cabinet with contact information including email, home/office/cell phone numbers and home addresses. Upon learning of a potential or actual occurrence of one of the above identified events, the Vice President over the affected area, e.g., Vice President of Finance and Administration oversees the Director of Safety and, in the case of a gas leak, will notify the President.

Actions in these guidelines are intended to be in conjunction with the University’s Emergency Operations Plan.

Methods of Communication
MU Alert Messaging System - Provides rapid notification via text and email messages to alert students, faculty and staff, as well as others signed up, of an emergency situation that requires them to take immediate action to preserve their safety and security. Participants must sign up to receive messages at https://mualert.millersville.edu/index.php?CCheck=1.

Bulk Email - A mass email can be sent to faculty/staff and another to students through their Millersville email account. Emails can be distributed by one person in each division.

Web Page Message
IT and University Communications can place emergency messages on the home page (www.millersville.edu) during emergencies.

Social Media – University Communications will post messages to social media as appropriate.

Media Outlets
- WHTM-TV ABC-27
- WHP CBS-21
- WPMT Fox-43
- WGAL-TV Channel 8
- WITF-FM
- Lancaster Online
- Snapper – Student Newspaper
- WIXQ – Student radio station

Provide speaking points to Information Desk at the Student Memorial Center