



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (Updated August 2009)

I. Purpose

This plan provides procedures and guidelines for communicating internally and externally in the event of an emergency or crisis situation at the University of New England. UNE's Crisis Management Team is responsible for activating the Crisis Response Plan. The Crisis Communications Plan specifically addresses the role that the Communications Office and other university officials have in conveying critical information in the event of a crisis, and should be used in conjunction with decisions made by the Crisis Management Team.

II. Objectives

1. To determine whether a crisis necessitates invoking the Crisis Communications Plan.
2. To assemble the Crisis Communications Team.
3. To implement immediate actions to:
 - a. Identify constituencies that should be informed
 - b. Communicate information and minimize rumors
 - c. Maintain or restore confidence and order

III. Procedures

1. Assessment – A crisis is defined as a situation or event (or threat of one) that abnormally affects the lives, health, safety and property of the University community, or which may be expected to seriously impair or halt the operation or normal activities of the University. The individual who is made aware of a crisis situation must notify the Director of Marketing & Communications who, in consult with the Crisis Management Team, will determine if the Crisis Communications Team should convene and enact the Plan. If so, the Director of Marketing & Communications will immediately inform the Vice President for Institutional Advancement.
2. Crisis Communications Team – The Crisis Communications Team consists of:
 - ▶ Vice President for Institutional Advancement
 - ▶ Director of Marketing & Communications
 - ▶ Associate Director of Communications
 - ▶ Director of Safety & Security
 - ▶ Asst. VP for Human Resources

- ▶ Website Manager
- ▶ Website Editor
- ▶ Dean of Student Affairs

Other University personnel will be added to the team based on the nature of the crisis.

The team will enact a plan of action that includes the following steps:

- **Identify UNE spokesperson(s):**
In most cases this would be the Director of Marketing & Communications. In some cases, this may be the person with the greatest knowledge of the crisis at hand. In the event of a significant crisis, the President or Provost must be the lead communications responder to convey a sense of control and public concern on behalf of the University.
- **Designate a Media Center location, if the situation warrants one.**
The nature of a particular crisis could call for emergency location of a Media Center to allow University officials to update reporters. A separate, nearby room with phone banks may also be established to allow reporters to file stories. These rooms should be located reasonably near to the site of a “crisis” and, if possible, separate from but reasonably close to the site where officials are meeting to evaluate and plan responses to the crisis. In addition, a lengthy crisis could require the creation of an information/hotline center through which callers can ask specific questions and report and receive responses to rumors. The location of these sites and hours of operation will be determined by the Communications Office in consultation with the Safety & Security Office and IT. Established information sites will be managed by Communications, and it may be necessary to request assistance from other offices to adequately staff the Center.
- **Prepare and provide facts, information and guidance**
If health-related (e.g., H1N1), provide info about symptoms, treatments, etc. If evacuation is necessary, provide locations, timing, and direction about where to go for more info (website, etc.)
- **Prepare core messages**
The public’s immediate assessment of a crisis is based on four factors:
 - **Empathy and/or caring**
 - **Competence, expertise and readiness**
 - **Honesty and openness**
 - **Dedication and commitment.**

The Communications Office has developed standby messages for internal and external audiences. In addition, holding statements can be utilized while a communications response is formulated based on situation and audience. Messages must be clear, consistent, and demonstrate concern; explain the situation and what UNE is doing to address the problem. Stick to the facts and the core messages. Be proactive and do not

postpone negative news. However, in the event of a fatality or accident involving a UNE student, faculty or staff member, next of kin must first be contacted prior to release of any public statement.

- **Launch emergency website/web page** – Once the UNE emergency ConnectED system has been initiated by the Director of Safety & Security, the Communications Office must ensure that the alert appears on website and communicated via all available vehicles. Important follow-up information should also be communicated at regular intervals to the UNE community as new information is provided.
- **Develop potential questions and answers**
Prepare for any media queries or questions from internal/external audiences by developing potential questions and appropriate answers. Provide communications/media coaching prior to press conference, if timing allows.
- **Notify UNE key audiences (prioritize based on incident):**
 1. Students
 2. Faculty
 3. Staff
 4. Parents
 5. Alumni
 6. Board of Directors
 7. Law enforcement
 8. Public
 9. Media

Privacy, Confidentiality and the Media

In emergency situations, it may be necessary to balance two competing priorities: 1) to provide the University community and/or the media with accurate and timely information, and 2) to maintain confidentiality. The Crisis Management Team determines who has the “need to know.”

- **Communicate the message and facts**
Communicate to UNE stakeholders, and first to internal audiences. Vehicles include: e-mail, voice mail, cell phones, website, emergency hotline, loudspeakers (if appropriate). For external audiences, if the situation warrants it, a press briefing or official statement should be issued, ideally within five hours of the event or crisis. The Communications Office should control the flow of information proactively by disseminating information internally once it is verified and, if warranted, by holding periodic press briefings for the media, depending upon the nature of the crisis.
- **Dispel any rumors** – Address and correct any rumors expeditiously to prevent them from spreading.

- **Brief all Communications Office employees who might interact with the media**, and inform them what details can be released. Other university employees who answer phones should be informed/reminded to direct all media calls to the Communications Office. *All media calls* should be routed through the Communications Office.
- **Log all information** ~ The Communications Office should track all media calls, requests and subsequent coverage.
- Depending on crisis, it may be necessary to issue joint press releases with city and state officials. When the crisis is citywide or statewide, stay in contact with officials to determine if joint releases are prudent or necessary.
- **Means of Notification to the UNE Community in the Event of an Emergency**

The University is prepared to meet the need for immediate notification as part of its Emergency Response Plan. We have numerous ways of distributing urgent information in the event of an emergency.

UNE Students, faculty and staff should familiarize themselves with the following communications methods. Some require contact information, so individuals are urged to sign up at U-Online (<http://uonline.une.edu/>) to update their emergency contact information. Once logged in, go to “Personal Information and Settings” and “Update Emergency Contacts.”

UNE ConnectED

UNE ConnectED is an emergency notification service that provides UNE faculty, staff and students with timely information and instructions during emergencies or other urgent situations that may directly affect their well-being. ConnectED can send messages to the university community by e-mail, telephone, cell phone and text messaging. ConnectED utilizes the emergency contact information provided at U-Online (<http://uonline.une.edu/>).

University of New England Website

The UNE website is a key means of communicating information related to major campus emergencies. Information will be posted on UNE’s homepage (www.une.edu) and linked to this Emergency Response website.

Telephone

Recorded emergency announcements are available at UNE's Emergency status line, 207-602-2012. Individuals who have entered their cell or landline telephone numbers as emergency contacts will also receive notification by their designated numbers.

E-mail

Individuals who have entered their e-mail address in U-Online will receive emergency notifications via e-mail.

News Media

UNE works with the local news media to disseminate information about weather-related school closings. Our local news television outlets are Channel 6 (<http://www.wcsh6.com/>), Channel 8 (www.wmtw.com) and Channel 13 (www.wgme.com). School closings are also communicated via Portland Radio Group stations, including 560 AM, WGAN (www.wgan.com).

UNE Intranet

UNE students, faculty and staff may also access emergency information via UNE's password-protected intranet.