**CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY-PULLMAN**

**Advancement and External Affairs and the Office of Emergency Management**

**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 the Crisis Communications Team, WSU External and Internal Communications, the WSU Police, 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 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:** Fulfill requirements of the Jeanne Clery Act

**OBJECTIVES:** 1.Meet the “without delay” standard for emergency notifications.

2. Release “timely warnings” that support and enhance emergency notification or make the campus aware of other potential and on-going threat situations.

**GOAL:** Establish effective short and long term communication responses to emergencies or incidents that could affect the University Community.

**OBJECTIVES:** 1. Activate appropriate communication resources quickly and efficiently;

2. Provide clear directions on what needs to be communicated in emergency situations;

3. Identify who needs to be informed

4. Communicate facts about the situation and minimize rumors

**GOAL:** Effectively communicate that WSU is aware of the incident, is managing it appropriately, and is providing for the needs of those affected by the incident.

**OBJECTIVES:** 1.Demonstrate confidence and order within the University through communications appropriate to the situation

2. Show how the University leadership is addressing the needs of the University Community

**III. PROCEDURES**

**1. Emergency Notification Policy**

The University has adopted an Emergency Notification policy to fulfill requirements of the Jeanne Clery Act (20 USC § 1092 (f)) and amendments thereto made by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008). This policy is published in the Campus Safety Plan. It provides that “upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health and safety of students or employees occurring on the campus, Washington State University will determine and employ communication methods appropriate to the situation to notify the affected university community immediately, and without delay. Confirmation of significant emergencies will require direct investigation by appropriate University personnel. Taking into account the safety of the community, Washington State University will determine the content of the notification and initiate the appropriate elements of the emergency notification system, unless the notification will, in the professional judgment of responsible authorities, compromise efforts to assist victims or to contain, respond to, or otherwise mitigate the emergency.

For all campus law enforcement issues, the WSU Police will be primarily responsible for confirming a significant emergency or dangerous public safety situation on campus through victim, witness or officer observations. Upon confirmation, WSU Police at the officer-in-charge or above level have the primary responsibility to prepare and issue campus law enforcement emergency notifications.

For other emergencies, (non-law enforcement) including but not limited to hazardous materials releases, utility failures, computer systems/telecommunications failures, hazardous weather, etc. affecting the WSU campus, other departments at WSU, including , but not limited to Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities Operations, or Information Technology, may also confirm a significant emergency. All confirmed non-law enforcement emergency notifications will be the responsibility of the Office of Emergency Management. Confirming departments will report the non-law enforcement emergency to the University Emergency Management Coordinator or his/her designee, who will have the primary responsibility to prepare and issue non-law enforcement emergency notifications. In the absence of the Emergency Management Coordinator or his/her designee, WSU Police will execute this responsibility.

Those authorized to issue emergency notifications will be responsible for determining the appropriate segment or segments of the campus community to notify. Incident circumstances may require that only a floor, building, facility, area etc. will need to be notified as compared to the entire campus.

Examples of situations that would require immediate emergency notifications could include:

* A dangerous suspect at-large for aggravated assault, robbery, arson, rape, murder (even if the suspect is in custody), etc.
* An occurring or impending natural disaster, or
* An occurring or impending man-made disaster.

An emergency notification should include information that would enable members of the university community to take actions to protect themselves. Information to promote safety would include specific information about the type of incident, time, location and instructions on what actions to take and other safety tips.”

**2. Activation Procedures for Emergency Operations**

The Emergency Operations Director will be notified of the emergency situation and release of the emergency notification as soon as possible after release of the notification. The Emergency Operations Director will notify the Crisis Communication Team and activate the appropriate members of the Emergency Operations Team as soon as possible under the circumstances.

The Crisis Communication Team comprises the **President, the Provost, the Vice President for Business and Finance, and the Executive Director of External Communications**. (The Executive Director of External Communications also serves as the Public Information Officer for the Emergency Operations Team.)

Time is of the essence in communicating crucial information to the university community and the news media, and the available members of the teams 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.

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

**3. Spokesperson:**

The **Crisis Communications Team** will designate a University spokesperson for the incident/event. Generally, this will be the highest-ranking individual on the team who has direct knowledge of the event. The individual selected will have credibility and understanding of the events surrounding the crisis. The Executive Director of External Communications may take over this process if the crisis is prolonged, but generally, should not be the initial communicator to the public, the media or the university community.

**4. Notifying Key Constituencies:**

After the initial emergency notifications**,** the Crisis Communications Team will manage follow-up crisis communications for the key constituencies for the duration of the emergency. 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.

Key constituencies include:

• Students

• Faculty/ Staff

• Parents of students

• Board of Regents

• State and Local Government-Governor’s Office, City and County

Officials, WHITCOM

• 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 by the Executive Director of External Communications to supplement communication with key constituencies and information provided to reporters by the spokespersons The fact sheet also needs to be provided to the WSU Crisis Phone Bank (Dean of Students Office) and all other offices on campus that are likely to be contacted by media or concerned students, parents or the general public. The fact sheet should also be provided to the City of Pullman Police, WHITCOM and the Whitman County Sheriff’s Office. It will be approved by the Crisis Communication Team and checked for accuracy by the Emergency Operations Director after consulting with those who have a direct knowledge of the crisis. Fact sheets released publicly or posted to the Internet must be time stamped and updated as information changes. Fact sheets should list the URL for the WSU ALERT webpage as a source for continuously updated information.

**6. Alerting the Media:**

The Executive Director of External Communications should decide 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 at appropriate times 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 constituencies.

**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 a WSU annual Emergency Operations Center exercise. Responsibility for approving updates to the Crisis Communications Plan rests with the Vice President for Business and Finance and the Executive Director of External Communications.

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

Within a week of the ending of the crisis, the Executive Director of External Communications will convene Advancement and External Affairs and Emergency Management staff for a review of lessons learned, and will prepare an After Action Report (AAR). This AAR may be used to provide summary information to University leadership. A more comprehensive campus-wide AAR may be coordinated through the Office of Emergency Management.