5 STEPS TO A SAFER CAMPUS:
A Master Plan for Emergency Preparedness

Presented by spōk
Whether the scenario is a female student being attacked, a chemical spill in a laboratory, the shooting of a campus police officer, a sudden snowstorm or a major data breach, well-structured on-campus emergency preparedness can reduce the effect of events and in some cases prevent emergencies from occurring.

The overall goals of emergency planning are straightforward:

- To provide a safe and secure environment for the campus community
- To meet regulatory requirements and minimize legal liabilities
- To protect your institution’s image and reputation
- To give assurance to students’ families
- To make sure you have the resources in place to respond appropriately in emergencies

This report shares a master plan for emergency preparedness, focusing on five themes:

- Building an agile response team
- Developing an optimal response plan
- Sharpening communications
- Engaging the community
- Showing daily evidence that campus safety is an administrative priority

Although budget constraints are a reality in higher education, many colleges and universities have prioritized solutions for campus safety and are gaining approval to allocate funds to make important and necessary changes. Taking the appropriate security posture in these areas can dramatically improve the outcomes colleges and universities experience when they respond to unexpected and critical events.
STEP ONE: BUILD AN AGILE, COORDINATED RESPONSE TEAM

By the nature of their levels of responsibility, certain people should always be informed about critical incidents that could affect the security, safety, health, and well-being of people on campus. Depending on the structure and size of your university, that core group may encompass these roles:

- Chancellor
- President
- Provost
- Director of campus police
- Director of the campus hospital
- Director of counseling and mental health services
- Director of facilities
- Director of IT
- Director of telecommunications
- Director of media outreach
- Director of general counsel
- Director of financial operations
- Director of human resources

This assembly is responsible for overall policy setting, creating the emergency-response framework, performing reviews after crises and pursuing continual improvement by integrating “lessons learned” into the response framework.

However, just as emergencies don’t always call for the same response, there shouldn’t be just a single campus-response team. The more effective approach is to build an agile team that is reconstituted or “extended” for each type of emergency.

For example, the manager of food services would be involved in incidents related to food safety, the director of residential life would be brought in for planning related to identification of students who would require assistance during evacuations, and the head of the international student services office would weigh in during planning related to the unique support of its constituents during an emergency.

That extended response team should also include external partners, such as the municipal police and fire departments, emergency medical agencies, other institutions in the region and even major suppliers (which may be called on to come through with deliveries during a period of isolation).

Some schools also involve students in their emergency planning. For example, North Carolina Central University participates in the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Community Emergency Response Teams, or CERT, program, enlisting students to “play a role in campus security and response during emergency situations.” This practice not only adds the student perspective to planning, but it also helps inform those students and their social networks about the reasons for drills and other activities.

TIP:
IDENTIFY YOUR CHAMPIONS

Although the goal of an agile response team is to speed up overall response in an emergency, that’s challenging in higher education. Governance tends to be highly dispersed. Campuses can span multiple sites and house a multitude of potentially sensitive and valuable data and research. On top of that, the community is in constant flux as students, faculty and guests come and go. As the FEMA Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education advises, senior leadership — the president, chancellor or provost — is vital “to help ensure engagement from the entire campus community” and “to provide both political and financial backing to the effort.”
STEP TWO: DEVELOP OPTIMAL RESPONSE PLANS AND PRACTICE THEM

No two campuses face precisely the same potential dangers. Understanding the most likely scenarios will help your institution plan appropriately and prioritize its investments — both human and financial — in emergency response.

That planning work starts with the identification of threats and hazards, which can be developed through a number of sources, including members of the emergency-response team sharing their own insights and experiences, institutional data such as that logged for compliance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act and regional agencies imparting local concerns.

The compilation of responses is then put through a risk-evaluation process. The use of risk-assessment techniques will help the response team understand the likelihood of a particular emergency, the potential effect, the amount of time the school will have to notify its community about the threat before it happens, and the expected and potential duration of the incident. The results serve as the initial outline for the response plan.

David Oliver, director of environmental health & safety at Western Kentucky University, recommends recruiting “owners” to develop individual segments of the plan. These will be the individuals most knowledgeable about a given aspect of the campus who can speak with a level of authority regarding how an emergency should be handled.

By putting the plan in modular form, you will be able to create custom versions applicable to specific areas on campus. Jay Gruber, Georgetown University chief of public safety, reports in an Educause presentation that “separate focused plans for campus first-responder groups are essential.” Likewise, you may be creating multiple parallel plans — one for emergency management and another for disaster recovery and business continuity.

Build time into the plan-development process to have stakeholders — both members of the emergency-response team and others from across the campus — review the draft to familiarize themselves with the contents and to isolate the parts that don’t make sense or contain wrong information.

Each year, the plan needs to be refreshed, not only to update emergency-contact details, but also to incorporate new processes and to apply lessons learned.

That review process also requires practice. Users need to test the use of the emergency alert systems as well as other security and safety measures on campus. Faculty, staff and students need to rehearse their responses in certain types of events, such as facing a shooter on campus or coping with the outcome of a natural disaster.

TIP: Offer Mutual Aid

Work with your neighboring universities to handle remote hosting of websites and critical IT systems for business continuity, to gain cross-staffing resources in the event of an emergency, to perform joint practice drills, and to acquire specialized equipment and training that can be shared between institutions.
As an extreme example, the head of the police department at Pasadena Community College used the planned demolition of a multistory building on campus to hold a “full-scale” earthquake drill that included simulated smoke, amplifiers that could broadcast bass tones “so loud the windows shook” and a loss of electricity to give rescue workers the experience of working in the dark. Participants were paired up — faculty members with facility personnel — to scope out potential problems with the water, gas and electricity infrastructure, and to practice search and rescue.

While there’s a place for “full-scale exercises” that involve local responders, Georgetown’s Gruber sees a compelling reason to use tabletop exercises (they’re “simple and focused”) and regular drills, such as activation of an emergency notification platform.

As the plans are being developed, give thought to how they will be distributed and accessed. Emergency plans in notebooks on shelves will never be found when they’re needed. One way to circulate plans is to use specialized technology that allows your institution to maintain its emergency plans virtually, in a software application, instantly accessible with a single icon click and always downloadable to any kind of computing device — PC, smartphone or tablet — for immediate access and launching of the alert. This approach has the added benefit of allowing for continual reworking of the plan; whatever version users access will be the latest.

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*Source: Center for Public and Nonprofit Management (CPNM) at the University of Central Florida; 45 responses
http://cprm.ucf.edu/research/TrainingFY2009AEM.php, UCF, CRU.pdf*
STEP THREE: SHARPEN COMMUNICATIONS

The 2007 shooting tragedy at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University led to greater adoption of mass-notification systems in colleges and universities across the country. Leading institutions use a multimodal approach. Subscribers are notified in an emergency by multiple means: landline and cell phones, SMS messaging, pagers, email, desktop alerts, digital signage, public address systems, fire alarms with speakers, emergency blue lights, social media notices, website alerts and, of course, word of mouth. Because simplicity during an emergency is important, messages should be quickly customizable and distributable through all channels from a single console.

While that’s a good start, it’s not where coordination of communications should end.

The goal should be to maintain “situational awareness,” which takes into account the idea that different emergencies require different responses. One example offered by Gerard Shallo, director of product marketing for Spok, “is a health emergency versus a dangerous situation such as an armed attacker. In one situation, your goal is to rush people toward the scene, while in the other, your goal is to rush people away from the scene. Situational awareness helps to feed the decision-making in both scenarios.”

Spok, which sells technologies for critical communications, recommends the use of an emergency notification system capable of delivering customized messages segmented by role. This kind of software enables the response team to manage messaging to reach the right people quickly for a given situation and escalate notifications appropriately as circumstances evolve. The software includes wizards to help the user build messaging for specific individuals and groups.

Spok® e.Notify also allows for two-way communication during an incident. Based on recipient response, follow-up messages can be customized, canceled or escalated. During an emergency, explains Terry Eby, Spok’s product manager for public safety, the ability to speak to the respondent may be vitally important to get the kind of behavior you want. “If you have somebody hysterical, you can do a lot more with voice than you can with texting.”

The company’s enterprise enhanced 9-1-1 or E9-1-1 solution allows campus officials to be placed into a "passive monitoring" mode, enabling them to listen on the line when a 9-1-1 call is put through. This gives the response team an immediate and firsthand understanding of the nature of the emergency as it is being relayed by the caller to the dispatcher.
Spok’s enterprise E9-1-1 solution also helps pinpoint the exact location of the call, not just the billing address. That feature is especially important on a campus, where a caller might be in any one of dozens of buildings and on any one of several floors.

“Many campuses still are running regular campus telephones,” says Spok’s Eby. Those phones, he noted, “have a tendency to make you dial ‘9’ before you can do anything off-campus, then you dial 9-1-1.” That can have tragic consequences for the caller, who may not understand the need to dial that extra digit to get a dial tone. “We go out of our way to teach our kids, ‘Dial 9-1-1!’ They know it as well as they know their names. But they go to all these places and they have to dial 9 first. How do you reprogram that poor kid when it’s an emergency?”

TIP:

Pagers Are Still Core to Communications!

Paging technology is still a “viable method of communication for campuses,” reports Spok’s Eby. “Even if you have a situation where so many people are clogging cell phones that they go down, paging will still work.” Two-way paging, such as that offered by Spok, allows a recipient to respond to a page with a message.

TOP 3 MASS NOTIFICATION CHANNELS ON CAMPUS

- Texts: 58%
- Emails: 77%
- Phone Trees: 50%

TOP 4 MASS NOTIFICATION CHALLENGES

- Student enrollment in text message alert systems: 31%
- Message delivery verification: 30%
- Cost: 28%
- Database management and updates: 27%
STEP FOUR: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Developing an effective emergency-response plan and putting new software in place won’t make a difference if the campus community is unaware of your efforts when it counts. Therefore, engaging people — particularly students — in helping to create a safer campus is an important part of achieving one.

Fortunately, you don’t need to wait for an emergency to create awareness. To get initial sign-ups and to remind current subscribers to update their contact and profile information, leading schools have had success with security and safety “campaigns” that try numerous outreach efforts:

- Promoting bystander interventions as a way to change the course of potentially unsafe situations
- Identifying and publicizing behaviors of “concern” so that students know what to watch for
- Engaging with specific populations of students to address their sensitivities
- Training staff to make personal, friendly contact with students and to follow up when they get less than positive responses

HOW CAMPUSES PROMOTE NOTIFICATION SERVICE SIGN-UPS

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<th>Method</th>
<th>Effective Sign-Ups</th>
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<tr>
<td>New-Student Orientation</td>
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<td>Website</td>
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<tr>
<td>New-Hire Orientation</td>
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MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SIGN PARTICIPANTS UP

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<th>Method</th>
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<td>New-Hire Orientation</td>
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Campus Safety; no response count available
An “emergency awareness week” at an East Coast college generated buzz to encourage sign-ups for the emergency notification system through:

- Alert text messaging sign-up stations around campus
- An email from the provost as well as one from the vice president for administrative affairs
- Messages on shuttle bus digital signage
- An alerts video played before movies at the campus movie theater
- Public service announcements played during a home football game
- An alerts video played on the campus cable channel
- Information posted on a commuter listserv
- Advisories sent out to parent groups
- Decals stuck on delivery and carryout packages
- A well-placed blurb on the website
- Flyers posted in residence halls

Outreach can extend beyond the campus borders as well, to communicate messaging to students and off-campus community members through neighborhood businesses and student hangouts.

TIP:
Plug Emergency Notification into the Orientation Process

Campuses struggle to maintain a “tipping point” level of sign-ups for their notification services. Most go the route of making sign-up voluntary, despite concern that not enough students will receive a warning when an emergency hits. Spok’s Eby recommends a middle ground: making subscribing to the notification service a requirement during student orientation.
STEP FIVE: SHOW DAILY EVIDENCE THAT CAMPUS SAFETY IS A PRIORITY

By addressing small problems every day, administrators communicate to students that care of the campus matters. It is, after all, their home away from home.

That includes staying on top of maintenance, such as cleaning up graffiti as soon as it appears, making sure hallways are clean and uncluttered, removing posters about events that have passed and replacing broken and burned out lights.

It also involves campus security, which can make a bigger showing by increasing the number of patrols by foot, bike, Segway or patrol car; taking petty theft seriously when it’s reported; and putting officers in highly visible locations, such as entrances to parking lots.

TIP: Escort Students

Although a number of companies are now promoting the idea of the virtual escort — an app that communicates to campus police that a student is leaving one location and expects to arrive at the next location within a certain time — the campus can show real concern for students by offering an in-person escort service with one modern-day twist: allowing students to request the service through a text message with geolocation information provided.

Cornell University staffs its campus police dispatch office 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Yet its public safety answering point (PSAP) was becoming aged. The institution worried that the proprietary system would malfunction one day, leaving the police department call center entirely unreachable. The team evaluated several possible replacements; however, none of the options could connect their 9-1-1 software directly into the university’s PBX switch, which incorporates a database that automatically identifies location. Then the team learned about Spok’s call center system, Spok® pc/psap. “We needed a company that could work with us to configure their software to fit our environment,” explains Mark Conrad, a member of police administration.

The Spok system allows the police department to field 4,000 calls a month, from 9-1-1 emergencies to questions about parking and inquiries from parents who haven’t heard from their children in a while. “We help them get in touch,” says Conrad.

Particularly useful features are the abilities for dispatchers to transfer a call with a single click directly from the screen, to better handle TDD calls from people with hearing impairments, and to track down a caller’s location even when a 9-1-1 call has been abandoned.

Keeping Up With Calls at Cornell

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CONCLUSION

Creating a secure campus environment that is ready to appropriately respond to all types of emergencies takes planning, engagement and clear communication between faculty, personnel, students and the larger university community. With proper planning, use of available tools and regular drills, schools can create not only a better emergency-response plan but also a safer campus overall.
Spok, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Spok Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: SPOK), headquartered in Springfield, Va., is proud to be a leader in critical communications for healthcare, government, public safety and other industries. We deliver smart, reliable solutions to help protect the health, well-being and safety of people around the globe. Organizations worldwide rely on Spok for workflow improvement, secure texting, paging services, contact center optimization and public safety response. When communications matter, Spok delivers.

SOURCES

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NIMS Implementation Activities for Schools and Higher Education Institutions

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Best Practices in Higher Education Emergency Management Conference

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