

# Crisis Communication Plan



**Purpose:** This plan outlines procedures for collecting and conveying information to the public during or immediately following an emergency or crisis. How a communication is handled in the first few hours and days during a crisis is critically important in terms of maintaining credibility and confidence with the public.

**Crisis:** A crisis is defined as a significant event, natural or accidental or intended, which prompts significant, often sustained, news coverage and public scrutiny and potentially could cause harm to the college's image and/or reputation. A crisis could be precipitated by an emergency (see below) or some other event of a catastrophic or controversial nature. Examples of the latter are civil disturbances, political controversies, or employee misconduct.

**Emergency:** An emergency is defined as fire, explosion, tornado, criminal act resulting in injury or severe property damage, or other events where police, fire, emergency medical, animal health or homeland security personnel are involved.

*Note: An emergency could, but will not always, lead to crisis.*

**Assumptions:** During a crisis much of what the public learns about the event is through news media. Negative news coverage can potentially damage an organization's reputation, however, a crisis also offers an opportunity to demonstrate excellence in response and accountability, and to communicate desired messages.

**Crisis Prevention:** Associate deans, department chairs, unit directors, assistant directors for Extension and other managers will maintain regular contact with the Dean and also with Agricultural Communications Services to advise them of developing issues within the college that potentially could escalate and lead to a crisis.

**Public Comments Policy:** Part of this plan's purpose is to insure that the appropriate person or persons represent and speak on behalf of the college during a crisis. College employees are discouraged from speaking to media during a crisis without permission from either the Dean's office, the Director of Agricultural Communications or the Associate Vice-president of UK External Affairs and/or UK Public Relations Director.

## Crisis Response:

1. Employee first encountering an emergency should immediately call 911 and, if safe and reasonable, provide comfort to the injured but not move them. UK Police must be notified within 2 hours.
2. Employee encountering an event should contact a supervisor. After-hours numbers will be posted at all labs, farms and facilities and calling should not stop without successfully reaching a supervisor.
3. Employee should also contact a UK Public Relations or Ag Communications specialist. Calling should continue until a PR or Ag Com person is reached.
4. Employee is asked to refer news media questions to university administrators or public relations officials.
5. Contacted supervisor should immediately call the Dean of Agriculture, or if Dean is not available, call an Associate Dean.
6. For non-emergency events (disturbances, misconduct, controversies), the Dean or an Associate Dean should be notified promptly.
7. Dean or Associate Dean will notify President or Provost or other appropriate university official. At this time the situation will be evaluated to determine if a crisis response is warranted. If warranted, the Dean will designate a temporary spokesperson. *(Note: Permanent spokesperson will be designated by the Dean in consultation with university administration and UKPR).*
8. If a crisis response is warranted, the Dean will immediately appoint a Crisis Communication Team (CCT) of between 4 and 7 members, including at least two members from Agricultural Communications.
9. **Crisis Communication Team (CCT)** will evaluate crisis and, if appropriate, immediately activate a crisis web page and crisis hotline for media inquiries. All media inquiries will receive a response and be logged.
10. In consultation with the Dean and UK External Affairs/UKPR, the CCT will consider organizing a news conference within 24 hours of the start of the crisis.

# Crisis Communication Plan



## Expansion of Concepts

### *Temporary Spokesperson*

The temporary spokesperson is the person, typically a university administrator or PR official, who makes initial comments to media. This person may or may not be designated the permanent spokesperson.

### *Permanent Spokesperson*

The permanent spokesperson will be approved by the Dean in consultation with university administration and UK External Affairs and/or UKPR. This person ideally will have good communication skills, high familiarity with facts related to the crisis, strong professional credentials, and the ability to remain calm under pressure.

### *Web site maintenance*

The crisis web site will be prepared generically in advance of any crisis, and will be activated by the CCT in consultation with the Dean's office. Agricultural Communications will coordinate with the CCT to produce content and maintain the web site in a timely manner.

### *Logging media inquiries*

A hotline phone number or existing number in the College of Agriculture will be designated for incoming media calls. A secondary number may also be established for incoming calls from the public. All calls will be responded to, and will be logged with name of caller, caller's organization or business, date and time of call, nature of request (questions, request for interview, etc.). The date, time and nature of the college's response also will be logged.

## Internal Communications

The Crisis Communication Team (CCT) will regularly brief the Dean and other appropriate administrators during the crisis. To reduce rumors, negative speculations, and unwarranted concerns the CCT will place a high importance on communicating to internal audiences. In consultation with the Dean, decisions will be made on how best to communicate information about the crisis to college employees, both on-campus and in other offices throughout the state.

## Procedures

### Following the Crisis

Agricultural Communications Services will document news coverage surrounding the crisis. When the crisis is over, documentation will be given to the CCT in order to evaluate the overall success of the crisis management effort, and then prepare and submit a crisis evaluation report to the Dean.

## Crisis Communication Team

At onset of crisis, Dean will appoint a Crisis Communication Team (CCT) of between 4 and 7 members, including at least two members from Agricultural Communications. The CCT will evaluate the crisis and, if appropriate, immediately activate a crisis web page and crisis hotline for media inquiries. All media inquiries will receive a response and be logged.

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