

## **Section III – Incident Command & Communications**

### **A. PURPOSE**

The Robert Morris University Incident Command & Communications process establishes responsibilities in the event of an emergency or disaster affecting the University, its students, faculty or staff, including policies and procedures for managing communications during and immediately following such situations. The overall Emergency Response Plan provides a framework for appropriate responses to various types and levels of emergency situations that may arise at any of RMU's locations – the Moon Township campus or the Island Sports Center. Procedures and processes within the scope of this Plan are intended to reduce risk to human life, protect the environment, preserve property, minimize danger, promote recovery and restore university operations. This Plan is not intended to cover every conceivable situation but rather to serve as a guideline and process for most emergency responses and crisis management efforts that may be outside of those routinely handled by department heads.

The communications aspect of the Plan provides direction for gathering information, managing the complexities of communication in a crisis, and disseminating information to targeted publics of the University and the mass media. Procedures outlined in the Plan can also be implemented and applied to off-campus crises affecting University-related individuals, if necessary. Recognizing the nature of crises, the Plan calls for flexibility in the management of institutional communications.

It should be noted that a poorly handled response to the media during a crisis can often result in misleading or adverse publicity about an organization. Such publicity can be costly in terms of reputation and credibility, as well as potential legal and financial liability. For these reasons, the task of formulating and disseminating information to the public in time of crisis is an increasingly complex issue.

#### University Communications Philosophy

The University will be open and forthright with its public communication as coordinated by the Director of Public Relations. The desired outcome is to maintain a trust in Robert Morris University by disclosing facts, answering questions truthfully, and communicating pertinent public information in a timely manner. Where possible, the University will also address public concerns caused by misinformation.

### **B. KEY DEFINITIONS**

1. Crisis vs. Issue: To better understand this Plan, it is necessary to differentiate between a crisis and an issue.
  - a. Issue- represents a problem that could potentially become a crisis, and can be characterized by terms such as ongoing, brewing, or unfolding. An issue during its initial stage requires attention, but an emergency type response may not be necessary. Issues include a wide range

of problems that have the potential to impact the University, but which may not involve a major threat to the University. Like crises, issues require persons or a team to gather facts to determine what, if any response is needed.

- b. Crisis- represents an immediate and major threat to the integrity of the institution or to life and property associated with the University. A crisis is sudden and can involve a serious threat to the reputation of the University. In a crisis, an immediate response is required and strategies are required to enable the University to gather and disseminate information effectively. A crisis requires a trained and prepared response team for managing public communication.

Examples of a crisis might include:

- i. Natural disasters such as fires and floods.
- ii. Man-made disasters such as violent crimes, riots, or demonstrations.
- iii. Controversial statements/actions of University-related persons.
- iv. Sudden death of key personnel or student(s).

Potential crises at Robert Morris University may also include, but are not limited to:

- i. Violent or sexual crime.
- ii. Sexual harassment/racial discrimination.
- iii. Suicide.
- iv. Demonstrations/strikes.
- v. Plane crash.
- vi. Significant health threat such as avian flu or meningitis.

2. Incident Command Center: The Incident Command Center is the designated area/room/location in which the Incident Command Team will meet to direct operations during a disaster or major emergency as defined above. The location of the Incident Command Center will always be the Facilities Services Center Building, unless determined otherwise.

3. Emergency/Severity Levels:

Level 1: Minor or contained emergency – Any incident that affects one department without grave potential consequences to affect other departments or that has a low-level potential to impact overall functional capacity of the university (such as a snow storm), excluding closure of the university. This includes individual non-contagious health emergencies that may require the assistance of an EMT but present no risk to other staff, faculty or students. In most instances, the Director of Public Safety or his designee will serve as the on-scene commander for these situations.

Level 2: Major emergency – Any potential or actual incident or situation that may disrupt the overall operations of multiple departments or buildings, but usually not campus-wide. Major support from internal maintenance and/or other campus services will likely be necessary in these situations,

and outside emergency personnel may also be required. While a potential risk to life and/or property could exist, closure of the University is unnecessary. Depending on the severity of the emergency, the University's Incident Command Team (or specific members of the Team) may be assembled at this level.

Level 3: Disaster – Any event or occurrence which seriously impairs or halts the operations of the University campus-wide, which may include mass injury to personnel and/or students and/or severe property damage. Both University and outside emergency response services are required. The Incident Command Team will be activated and may be summoned to the Incident Command Center.

## **C. PROCEDURES/WHEN AND EMERGENCY OR CRISIS OCCURS:**

### 1. General / Crisis Guidelines

- a. What constitutes an issue? When a situation occurs that could result in a threat to the health or safety of students, faculty or staff.
- b. What constitutes a crisis? When a situation continues or deteriorates to the point that it presents a threat to the health or safety of students, faculty, or staff, or the integrity of the institution, or generally affects the wellbeing of campus visitors and the college community.
- c. When should you contact senior administrations? When you see or hear of an issue or crisis that can or will affect the overall well-being of either a segment of or the entire campus.
- d. What is the first thing I should do when I see a potential crisis? Call the Public Safety Department at (412) 397-2424, followed by your department head or a senior-level administrator (regardless of the time of day). You should call all available numbers until you reach the person you are calling. This includes office, cellular, pager and, if necessary, home numbers.

### 2. Process, Authority and Chain of Command

Preliminary notification and situational assessment:

Any internal and external emergency situations, disasters affecting the institution, or life threatening situations must be reported to the Public Safety Department at the 24-hour emergency alert number (412) 397-2424 and then to your immediate department head/supervisor.

Public Safety will act as the scene incident command and will perform an assessment of the situation in order to determine the situation's severity level. The Director of Public Safety will then notify the Vice President for Human Resources as well as any other appropriate Senior Vice President and/or Vice President on the Incident Command Team.

The Director of Public Safety, along with the Vice President for Human Resources, will determine the level of the emergency severity. The Senior Vice President for Business Affairs will notify the

President of emergency situations and disasters other than routine departmental concerns/issues. The authority to declare a campus state of emergency rests with the President or his designee.

For a full description of the emergency response process, please refer to the Emergency Management Checklists in Appendix A and B of this section.

### 3. Incident Command Team

The Incident Command Team (“the Team”) is responsible for directing activities relating to severe Level 2 and all Level 3 emergencies. The Team will convene to assess the incident and put into motion necessary aspects of the Emergency Response Plan, insure life and safety issues are met, protect property and equipment, determine the necessary outside agencies and other community organizations to contact, coordinate recovery and restoration activities, and follow up on documentation, administration and logistics. The Incident Command Team consists of the following members or their designated representatives:

Note: The President of the University may serve on the ICT as he/she so chooses.

- Senior Vice President for Business Affairs
- Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
- Vice President for Student Life
- Vice President for Facilities
- Senior Director of Public Relations
- Director of Public Safety
- Director of Environmental Health and Safety
- Co-Chairs of the Emergency Management Sub-Committee

Either the Senior Vice President for Business Affairs or Provost and Senior VP, Academic Affairs will preside over the Team throughout the crisis.

The Incident Command Team will be augmented on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature/scope of the emergency/crisis, but is likely to include some of the following members of the University community:

- Vice President for Human Resources and Information Technology
- Vice President for Financial Operations
- Senior Vice President for Institutional Advancement
- Vice President for On-line and Off Campus Programs
- Vice President for Enrollment

- Vice President for Public Relations and Marketing
- Vice President and General Counsel
- Senior Associate Provost for Academic Affairs/ University Registrar
- Executive Director - Island Sports Center
- Executive Director of International Programs
- Director of Athletics
- Director of Residence Life
- Director of the Center for Student Success
- Director of Counseling Center
- Members of Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee of University Safety Committee

#### 4. Communications During an Emergency or Crisis:

In case of an emergency of major proportion, it can be expected that the media (reporters, photographers, and radio and television personnel) will appear on the scene. At such times, Robert Morris University becomes particularly vulnerable in its handling of the media. What any Robert Morris University employee or student says to the media will become critical because reporters will call any RMU employee a “Robert Morris University spokesperson.”

For these reasons, all inquiries from the media must be directed to the Senior Director of Public Relations AND only the officially designated University spokesperson(s) (most often the Senior Director of Public Relations) should address the media. In some instances (i.e., news conferences), the University President or other administrators may serve as a spokesperson for limited periods of time, but only in consultation with the Senior Director of Public Relations.

The Robert Morris University Incident Command Team will be responsible for framing the information/messages that will be shared with the media and key constituencies in the event of a crisis, including the time frame and context of the messages that will be shared. In addition, the Team will compile a list of all Robert Morris University publics affected by the crisis, which may include the Board of Trustees, donors, alumni, students, families of students, friends of the university, faculty union leadership and staff. The President or a designated representative(s) will correspond directly with these publics in the form of personal letters or phone calls relating the facts, communicating concern, and describing what is being done to correct the situation.

The Public Relations Department will advise and work with the Team to implement the communication activities that need to occur internally to students, faculty and staff, or externally to the media.

Communications activities during a crisis may include:

- Recording and making arrangements to continuously update information on the main University phone line (412) 397-3400 (general public) and/or designated media phone line (412) 397-5291, as well as the University web site.
- Notifying all receptionists, operators, secretaries and maintenance staff of designated contacts for inquiries (Senior Director of Public Relations in the case of inquiries from media, Vice President of Student Life/Public Safety Department in case of calls from parents/students, etc.). All inquiries should be logged and reported to the Senior Director of Public Relations.
- Blast distributions to campus community via either or both voice mail or email systems.
- In the event of a large-scale crisis, a Communications Center (different from Incident Command Center) will become necessary to hold regular news conferences. Room #230 of the Athletic Building (Joe Walton Stadium) will serve as the designated location for news conferences and dissemination of information as it becomes available. The Director of Conference and Facility Services will immediately equip the Communications Center with necessary sound equipment, tables, chairs and podium. The Senior Director of Public Relations will assemble press kits with fact sheets addressing the crisis and coordinate and officiate the news conferences. The spokesperson will be available to the media throughout scheduled news conferences.

Phones: Provided by IT

Computers: Provided by IT

Fax: Conference and Facility Services Office, from Sewall Center

Food: Provided by Parkhurst, from Sewall Center

The Incident Command Team will designate alternate sites as deemed necessary, and computers, phones, and fax machines from the Sewall Center will be moved to the appropriate place or provided by IT. Cell phones will be used in the case of a power outage.

Additional actions to consider and communicate in website postings and other communications, depending upon the nature of the crisis, may include:

- Free telephone calls for students to call home
- Special phone lines set up to accommodate incoming calls
- Extension of academic, fee and other deadlines
- 24-hour escort service
- Meetings with student organizations
- Grief counseling
- 24-hour on-site counseling in student residences
- Free housing on campus throughout the crisis
- Cancellation of sporting events, social events and similar activities
- Increased security

The Public Relations Department, with assistance from the Executive Assistant to the President, will monitor press clippings and broadcast coverage. The Academic Media Center will be responsible for recording all television coverage and providing the Public Relations Department with broadcast segments as they become available.

Rumor Control: Information will be regularly updated on the main University phone line (412) 397-3400 and/or a designated phone line (412) 397-5291 (general public relations number), as well as posted at [www.rmu.edu](http://www.rmu.edu). All official university statements, chronological facts sheets and updated materials will be made available to members of the working media. Internal dissemination of information, including memos or emails from the designated spokesperson for the University, an official statement, and updated fact sheets, will be made available to all university employees. This will keep the entire campus community aware of the situation and avoid rumors.

Crisis Communications Media Kit Contents (as relevant to situation):

- Annual Report
- Robert Morris University Profile
- Chronological Fact Sheet Detailing the Crisis Situation
- Prepared Statement Regarding Crisis
- Crime Statistics
- Area Hotel Information with Telephone Numbers and Directions
- Note Pad
- Campus Map
- Map(s) of Moon Township and Pittsburgh

Designated Spokesperson:

In the event of an emergency, the Vice President for Public Relations and Marketing, Senior Director of Public Relations or designee will serve as the University's spokesperson and will determine any information that is to be released to the media. The current designated spokespersons are:

Primary Spokesperson

Senior Director of Public Relations

Phone: (412) 397-5291

The decision-making process of the information to be released will be discussed with the core members of the Incident Command Team, also including the University President when appropriate.

In addition to the primary and secondary spokespersons, individuals who may serve as technical resources or advisors include:

1. Public Safety/Crime	Director of Public Safety
2. Financial and Facilities issues	Senior Vice President for Business Affairs
3. Student issues	Vice President of Student Life
4. Faculty issues	Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
5. Staff issues	Vice President for Human Resources and Info. Technology
6. Athletics	President/Athletics Director
7. Legal issues	President/General Counsel
8. Health issues	Student Health Nurse

#### **D. RECOVERY FROM AN EMERGENCY OR CRISIS**

##### Restoration

Once an end to the emergency is foreseen, a recovery plan is in order. Restoration to normal operations may include:

- The decision to reoccupy a building or multiple buildings. This authorization will come through the Director of Public Safety.
- Debriefing of administrators, staff, faculty and student leaders.
- Internal communications or a public statement from the President of the University, as deemed necessary, provided by the Public Relations Department.
- A review of the crisis situation with the Incident Command Team following the event. At this time, the entire crisis plan should be reviewed and any improvements should be made to the plan.
- Counseling for the campus community through outside agencies and/or the University's on-campus Counseling Center, arranged by the Incident Command Team in a Level 3 emergency or by a Senior Vice President, Vice President or their designee for a Level 1 or 2 emergencies. Coordination of counseling for the community may be offered as a result of a Level 3 emergency in cooperation with outside agencies.
- An update to the University's legal counsel for potentially litigious situations.
- The Senior Director of Public Relations will send thank you notes to the working media. Other methods of communicating appreciation should come from the President's Office or designated person(s) from the Incident Command Team.



**E. SIGNATURES:**

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David L. Jamison, J.D.  
Provost & Senior Vice President  
Academic Affairs

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Dan W. Kiener  
Senior Vice President  
Business Affairs

