

## **Section III- Incident Response & Communications**

### **A. PURPOSE**

The Robert Morris University Incident Response & 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, Pittsburgh location, 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 times 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 vice president for public relations and marketing. 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 threats such as avian flu or meningitis.

2. Incident Response Center: The Incident Response Center is the designated area/ room/location in which the Incident Response Team will meet to direct operations during a disaster or major emergency as defined above. The location of the Incident Response 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 Chief of RMU Police 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 Response 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 Response Team will be activated and may be summoned to the Incident Response Center.

### **C. PROCEDURES/WHEN AN 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, and/or staff, or the integrity and reputation of the institution, or generally affects the wellbeing of campus visitors and the university 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 RMU Police 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 RMU Police Department at the 24-hour emergency number (412) 397-2424 and then to your immediate department head/supervisor.

RMU Police Department 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 Chief of RMU Police or designee will then notify the General Counsel as well as any other appropriate Senior Vice President and/or Vice President on the Incident Response Team.

The Chief of RMU Police, along with the Office of General Counsel, will determine the level of the emergency severity. The Senior Vice President for Business Affairs and Treasurer 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 Response Team

The Incident Response 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 Response Team consists of the following members or their designated representatives:

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

- Senior Vice President for Business Affairs and Treasurer
- Provost and Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs

- Vice President for Student Life
- Vice President for Facilities
- Vice President for Public Relations and Marketing
- Chief of RMU Police
- Senior Director, Capital Projects & Safety
- Co-Chairs of the Emergency Management Sub-Committee

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

The Incident Response 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
- Chief Accounting and Financial Planning Officer and Assistant Treasurer
- Senior Vice President for Institutional Advancement
- Vice President for Corporate Relations and Senior Vice Provost
- Vice President for Enrollment Management
- Vice President, Public Relations and Marketing
- General Counsel and Vice President for Legal Affairs and Risk Management
- Executive Director - Island Sports Center
- Director, Center for Global Engagement
- 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.” Employees should first consult with the PR/Marketing Departments before speaking to the media. Students should be advised to follow this same process.

For these reasons, all inquiries from the media must be directed to the vice president for public relations and marketing or whomever he or she has designated as an official university spokesperson. Only the officially designated University spokesperson(s) 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 vice president for public relations and marketing.

The Robert Morris University Incident Response Team will be responsible for crafting 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 through written and/or verbal communications relating the facts, communicating concern, and describing what is being done to correct the situation. At all times the Team should share information at the highest level of transparency needed to ensure the safety of the campus community and the integrity of the institution.

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. PR staff will consult with outside public relations counsel as needed.

Communications activities during a crisis may include:

- Recording and making arrangements to continuously update information on the main University phone line (412) 397-3000 (general public) and/or designated media phone line (412) 397-5291, as well as the University website and social media channels.
- Notifying all receptionists, operators, secretaries and maintenance staff of designated contacts for inquiries (vice president for public relations and marketing in the case of inquiries from media, Vice President of Student Life/RMU Police Department in case of calls from parents/students, etc.). All inquiries should be logged and reported to the Vice President of Public Relations and Marketing.

- Distributing messages to the campus community via RMU Alert, when appropriate, and all other communication channels including email and voice.
- In the event of a large-scale crisis, a Communications Center (different from Incident Response 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 vice president of public relations and marketing or his or her designee(s) 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 and Two-Way Radios: Provided by IT

Computers: Provided by IT

Fax: Conference and Facility Services Office, from Conference Center

Food: Provided by Parkhurst, from PNC Cafe

The Incident Response Team will designate alternate sites as deemed necessary, and computers, phones, and fax machines from the Conference 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:

- 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 Special 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) 397-3000 and/or a designated phone line, 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):

- Robert Morris University fact sheet
- Chronological Fact Sheet Detailing the Crisis Situation
- Prepared Statement Regarding Crisis
- Crime Statistics
- Area Hotel Information with Telephone Numbers and Directions
- Campus Map

Designated Spokesperson: In the event of an emergency, the Vice President for Public Relations and Marketing, Director of News and Information, 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:

Jonathan Potts

Vice President for Public Relations and Marketing

Phone: (412) 397-5291 or 412-216-6486

Mark Houser

Director of News and Information

Phone (412) 397-5293 or 412-310-1098

The decision-making process of the information to be released will be discussed with the core members of the Incident Response 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:

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|---|--|
| 1. Police/Crime                                     | Chief of RMU Police                          |
| 2. Financial and Facilities issues<br>and Treasurer | Senior Vice President for Business Affairs   |
| 3. Student issues                                   | Vice President of Student Life               |
| 4. Faculty/ Academic issues                         | Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs   |
| 5. Staff issues<br>Technology                       | Vice President for Human Resources and Info. |
| 6. Athletics  | President/Athletics Director                 |
| 7. Legal issues                                     | President/General Counsel                    |
| 8. Health issues<br>representatives                 | UPMC MyHealth@School center                  |

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

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 Chief of RMU Police.
- 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 Response 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 Response 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 Vice President of Public Relations and Marketing 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 Response Team.

**E. SIGNATURES:**

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Academic Affairs  
Treasurer

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