



EASTERN OREGON  
UNIVERSITY

## **Crisis and Issues Management Plan Eastern Oregon University**

Office responsible: Marketing, Development & Public Affairs; Tim Seydel, Assoc. Vice President  
Plan Implemented: August 1999; Updated: 1/01; 5/02, 6/03, 5/06, 9/08, 9/09

### **PURPOSE**

To clearly communicate with the Eastern Oregon University community in times of crisis or when critical issues face the university by preparing in advance university personnel and offices who will be responsible for dealing with a crisis and for gathering and relaying accurate and critical information to internal and external audiences.

### **CRISIS SITUATION**

A crisis situation or critical issue shall be defined as any event or situation identified by the President, one of the Vice Presidents and/or senior staff as having a major impact on the university community. Examples include a fire, explosion, suicide, accidental death, illness sweeping the university, weather disaster, assault or rape, drowning, serious off-campus accident or incident with a traveling athletic team or group of students, political, legal, or news event(s) wherein the University plays a significant role, whether by choice or not, or a national disaster, crisis or issue. It does not include isolated incidents that would be handled internally by those overseeing Student Affairs or other specific divisions. The term “crisis” or “critical” most frequently refers to the period immediately following a situation that has widespread interest among the University, local, regional and national communities, thus generating local, state and national media coverage, requiring the University’s full attention for its duration.

### **PROCEDURE**

#### **General**

To alert the University of a current or potential crisis or for updates, information, or questions about EOU issues, the contact procedure is as follows:

1. Contact your Dean or Director. In their absence, contact the VP for Marketing, Development, Public Affairs the EOU Foundation (MDPA).
2. Contact the President’s Office (Provost’s Office in President’s Absence).

## **Institutional or Faculty/Staff Crisis or Critical Issue:**

Examples: an accident, traumatic event (arrest, assault, rape), or death of a faculty or staff member, a serious off-campus accident, event involving emergency services and/or the police or sheriff's department, or any political, legal or news event in which the University plays a significant role.

1. Immediate response: Dean, Department Director or Supervisor calls 911/Fire Department/Emergency Unit and/or division Vice President (President in event of Vice President's absence).
2. Vice President contacts President (Provost in President's absence), VP MDPA and Physical Plant (as needed).
3. President convenes Crisis/Critical Issues Management Team<sup>1</sup>, which:
  - A. Gathers and clarifies details to establish an information baseline;
  - B. Identifies spokesperson;
  - C. Identifies contact for family of faculty/staff directly involved;
  - D. Assigns specific responsibilities for Team members as needed.
4. The VP MDPA drafts a response and contacts and responds to other publics as assigned by the President, including the University community, local and/or specific media outlets and community, regional media and OUS Communications Office.

## **Student Crisis**

Examples include an accident, traumatic event (arrest, assault, rape), or death of a student, serious off-campus accident with a traveling athletic team or group of students, event involving emergency services and/or the police or sheriff's department, or any political, legal or news event in which the University plays a significant role.

1. Immediate response: Residence Assistant or Residence Director calls 911/Fire Department/Emergency Unit and Vice President for Student Affairs (Director of Residence Life in Vice President's absence).
2. Vice President for Student Affairs contacts the President (Provost in President's absence), VP MDPA and Physical Plant
3. President convenes Crisis/Critical Issues Management Team<sup>2</sup>, which:
  - A. Gathers and clarifies details to establish an information baseline;
  - B. Identifies spokesperson;
  - C. Identifies contact for parents of students directly involved;
  - D. Assigns specific responsibilities for Team members as needed.

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<sup>1</sup> See Crisis Teams, Section V, item D at end of document.

<sup>2</sup> See Crisis Teams, Section V, item D at end of document.

4. VP MDPA drafts official response/statement and contacts and responds to other publics as assigned by the President, including the University community, local media and community, regional media and OUS Communications Office.

### **Contact Information**

Make all emergency numbers known. Post in catalog, faculty/staff directory, student handbook, website, etc. Make all students aware of the “EOU Alert” Emergency Notification Service, 911 emergency service, provide residence hall directors and assistants with telephone numbers for fire department, emergency unit, hospital, police, poison control center. Also have leadership numbers available—President, Provost, Vice Presidents, Deans, Director of Residence Life, Security Office, Physical Plant.

## **COMMUNICATING INFORMATION**

It is crucial to identify a spokesperson to will work directly with the top decision-maker. It should be someone who can speak with authority, have an understanding of the media and will be responsible for gathering information and relaying it to the various constituencies, including the media. The President should be involved but at the outset should not be the University spokesperson until it is clear what has happened and the university has a response. The initial spokesperson should be the VP MDPA or the vice president responsible for the area affected by the crisis. *In any event, there should be only one voice at all times representing the university to the public.*

### **I. PURPOSE**

Describe the role of the Division of Marketing, Development, Public Affairs & the EOU Foundation (MDPA) in collecting and conveying information to the public during or immediately following a crisis or emergency situation.

### **II. SITUATION**

- A. Each crisis or emergency will require a unique public information response; the extent of the response will depend on the nature of the crisis.
- B. MDPA contacts include a broad range of internal and external constituencies, including print and broadcast media, community and political resources, alumni, and parents. The office serves as liaison with other university units during a crisis.

### **III. ASSUMPTIONS**

- A. Often the only information the public receives about an emergency is through the media; therefore, media relations are an essential element of any crisis plan.
- B. A crisis situation is big news and is likely to result in more public exposure for the University than hundreds of “good news” stories.

### **IV. OPERATIONS**

## **A. General**

1. To ensure that the University's public information response to an emergency is quick, accurate, sensitive and responsible, MDPA will coordinate crisis communications with the university and off-campus media. MDPA will set up a crisis communications center in its offices to remain open 24 hours a day during a crisis.
2. During an emergency, the VP MDPA and/or their designee will serve as the University's spokesperson. Staff and other internal contact people will be given the spokesperson's name and phone number for referral of media calls.

## **B. Phases of Response**

### **1. Immediate**

- a. The President's office and the official spokesperson will determine if an official statement should be prepared and released.
- b. Spokesperson will brief all personnel assigned to answer the phone. Telephones in the MDPA will be designated as crisis hot-line phones with recorded messages of the latest information on the situation, one for the university community, one for all incoming calls. Those phone numbers will be made available to the media at the beginning of a crisis period for dissemination to the public. A staff member will be assigned to update recorded messages for those phones.
- c. Spokesperson will get basic information (type of emergency/disaster; time of event; actions taken; area and number of people involved; fatalities, injuries and extent of damage) and prepare an official news release. MDPA staff will be kept apprised of breaking news to enable them to answer media questions.
- d. Spokesperson will verify all sources of information.
- e. Spokesperson will clear news release with the President's office as quickly as possible before releasing it to the media.
- f. In cases involving employee or student injuries or deaths, appropriate university personnel will notify families before the information is released to the public.
- g. Spokesperson will coordinate the release of factual information with local hospitals and other disaster agencies, providing as prompt, accurate and complete information as possible.

### **2. Ongoing period**

In a crisis, MDPA staff will:

- a. Provide—via the news media and other available resources (EOU Alert, web, email, hotlines)—the public and university constituents with basic information about an emergency or threatened emergency.

- b. Keep the public, media and constituents informed of the situation and provide advice on what they should or should not do to prevent further damage or loss of life, panic or interference with emergency response efforts.
- c. Keep the public, media and constituents informed of where to seek temporary housing, food, etc. if that applies.
- d. Instruct the public on how to obtain further advice or information using news media and university resources such as EOU Alert, e-mail and web.

MDPA will issue media updates as long as necessary, then scale back activities as warranted.

## **V. ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. Organization**

- 1. The VP MDPA and/or their designee will supervise communications with the media.
- 2. MDPA staff members, as well as other university units and staff members, will be called upon for assistance when necessary.

### **B. Responsibilities**

- 1. MDPA will provide assistance for compiling and relaying official statements to print and broadcast media.
- 2. Press Conferences: When a press conference is called, the VP MDPA will lead those efforts. As soon as additional information becomes available, it will be relayed to the main office, enabling staff there to pass along the information to the media as they call with their questions. The President will speak at a press conference when a major crisis needs to be addressed or when he wishes to issue updates on the situation. It is not recommended to put the President out front at the onset of a crisis. Until the picture becomes clear, the official spokesperson should handle media communications.
  - a. Press Conference Site: Designate a site large enough to accommodate media and their gear (cameras, lights, sound equipment). Use rooms in primary locations as available. Assess and alert appropriate staff for electrical outlets, access and other accommodations.
  - b. Time: Must be convenient to the University's personnel but also be early enough for media to meet news deadlines. This consideration is important for maintaining positive relationships with the media and eliminating rumor, speculation and misinformation. Depending on the crisis and the information to be released, consideration should be given to timing for live coverage of a mid-day or early-morning news broadcasts.
  - c. Parking: A university security officer should be posted to direct media to parking areas.

### **C. Media Relations**

- 1. **Interviews.** Members of the crisis team (see "Issues/Crisis Team") will be available for interviews related to their specific areas and may be interviewed at

their posts or some central location to be determined by the President and the VP MDPA. When a reporter contacts a member of the crisis team directly, the designated spokesperson for that unit may respond to questions in his/her area of expertise and immediately inform MDPA of the interview to enable media tracking and news compilation.

- 2. General Observations.** Dealings with the media always should be honest and courteous to encourage the media's confidence in and respect for University personnel. Spokesperson's attitudes toward media reflect on the image of the University. Withholding information from the media will generate distrust.

#### **D. Issues/Crisis Teams**

Based upon the type of crisis or critical issue, certain key people will work directly with the President's Office and MDPA to facilitate the dissemination of information. The key to an effective crisis/critical issue team is to form an effective response team. It is not recommended to view this group as a committee.

##### **Students:**

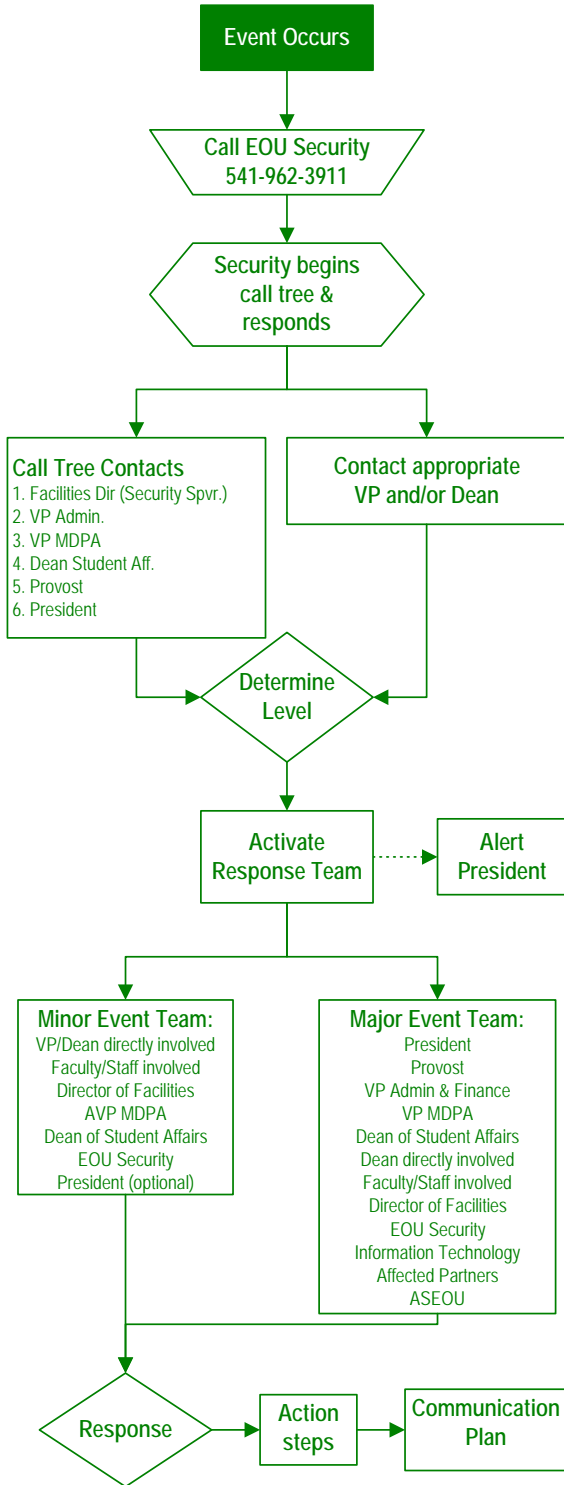
President  
Provost  
Vice President for Student Affairs  
Director of Physical Plant  
VP MDPA Affairs  
Director of Residence Life  
Director of Student Health  
Director of Athletics (if crisis involves sports)

##### **Institutional or Faculty/Staff:**

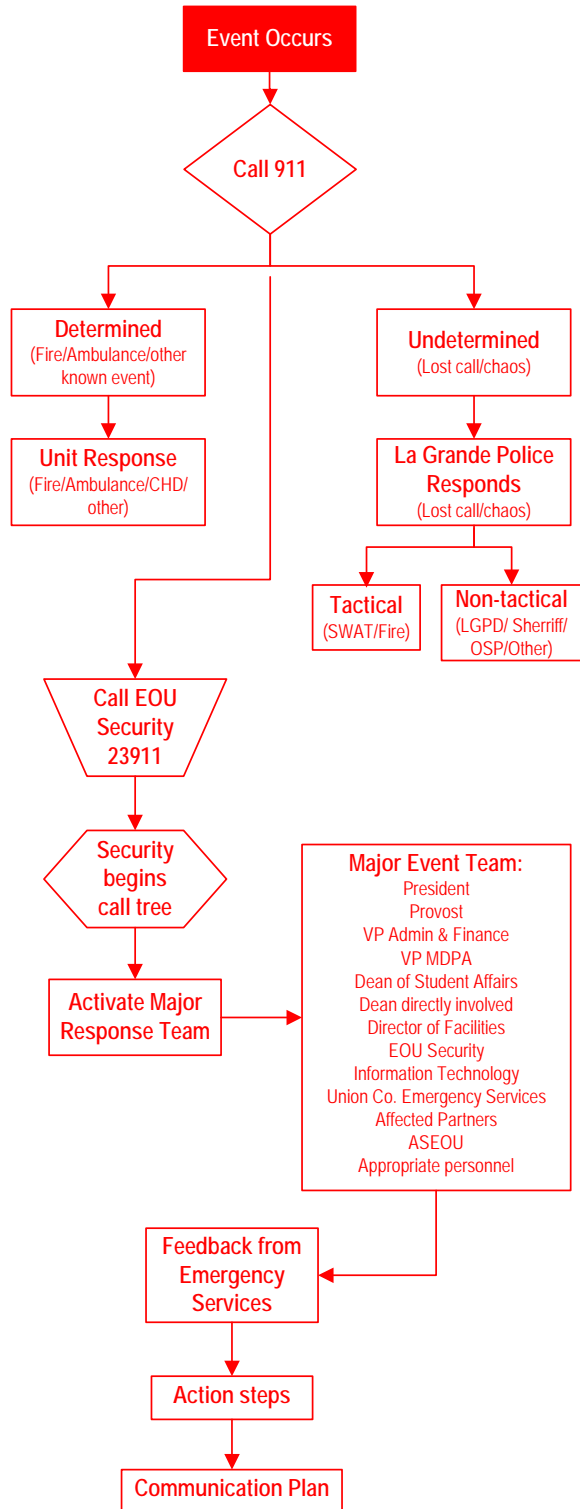
President  
Provost  
VP MDPA  
Director of Physical Plant  
Vice President directly involved

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**Green Alert:** A minor incident that impacts individuals or a portion of the campus and can be resolved with internal resources or limited help. Call 23911.



**Red Alert:** Immediate threat to life and/or property. Call 911.



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