

# **Central Texas College Crisis Communication Plan Community Relations Standard Operating Procedures**

## **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this plan is to outline media relations and communications procedures during a crisis. It is designed to serve as an adjunct to the existing CTC Emergency management Incident Command System (CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE DISTRICT SAFETY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL, Policy No. 300).

## **II. Scope**

This policy is applicable to all CTC locations. Procedures may vary for locations-at-a-distance. The Chancellor or appropriate Executive Officer will determine central campus involvement and appropriate delegation of authority to the site location or campus. For sites located on military installations, coordination with the Education Services Officer, along with the local military public affairs office and possibly military police or emergency operations center, will also likely be required.

## **II. What is a crisis?**

A crisis situation is defined as any circumstance or event identified by the chancellor as having a real or potential major impact on the campus community as a whole. Each crisis or emergency will require a unique public information response dependent on the nature of the crisis.

## **III. Release of Information**

### **A. General Guidelines**

It is essential that the College deliver a rapid, accurate, and complete response in a crisis, within constraints imposed by concern for individual privacy and legal responsibility.

The release of any information surrounding a crisis situation will be coordinated by the community relations department. Only the Chancellor or his designee will be authorized to speak for the college in an emergency situation.

A first response team, consisting of the Community Relations Director, the Chancellor, the Campus Police Chief and the Director of Risk Management and/or College attorney, or their designees, will direct response at the first level of a crisis. As soon as one member of this first response team is alerted to a crisis incident, he/she will contact other members of the team. Depending on the nature of the incident, the Chancellor or designee may convene a larger team to assist in assessment and response to the crisis.

Critical, on-call personnel or crisis team members will be identified in each department before a crisis occurs. Emergency contact information will be updated and distributed Every ninety days.

## **B. Order of Notification/Release**

Whenever possible, appropriate details and actions taken by the college during an emergency should be provided to students, staff and faculty first. Information should also be provided to those groups that may receive calls from the public. Constituents who should be contacted include:

1. students, employees and families
2. parents of students
3. board of trustees
4. alumni, friends, community leaders and government offices
5. representatives of targeted audiences
6. media

## **C. Protection of Privacy and Concerns for College Liability**

In all instances, the college must strive to balance a student or employee's right to privacy with the need to be cooperative with the media. The release of information regarding a student is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

When inquiries are directed to the college concerning a criminal charge or a pending criminal investigation, caution will be exercised in releasing information that could interfere with an investigation or a subsequent legal proceeding. Risk Management and/or legal counsel will be contacted immediately to provide input into the response.

In the event of injury or death, the college will not release the names involved until notification of family/next of kin has first been achieved. The names may then be released provided authorization is on file to release directory information according to FERPA guidelines.

## **D. What should/should not be released**

Information that is speculative should not be released. Unless proven and verified, the college *will not* release information on or speculate about the following:

1. Number of deaths/injuries
2. What was damaged, if anything
3. Estimates concerning the extent of damage in dollars cannot be accurate during the first hours of an emergency and are best released when verified.
4. Estimates concerning the length of time it will take to put a damaged facility back online.
5. Speculation on cause and blame placed on any individual, agency or piece of equipment.
6. Estimates of original costs
7. Comments on judicial or administrative processes in which findings have not been issued.
8. College shutdown (if any)

9. If and how safety rules were violated, by anyone
10. Possible effect on the community
11. Events as they transpired
12. Information involving military or DoD personnel, facilities or contracts related to the disaster without the prior approval of appropriate public affairs personnel

Once proven and verified, the college will release information about the following:

1. factual account of events as we know them
2. background information
3. update of events as they unfold
4. actual cause of crisis
5. course of action
6. extent of physical damages

#### **IV. Crisis Communication Procedures**

1. All facts will be gathered, and core members of the crisis team will immediately convene and decide the first course of action. A statement for release to the media, based on the information available, will be the first priority.
2. Media communications will be managed from the Community Relations Department.
3. A list of talking points to summarize the situation and cover possible media inquiries will be compiled, staffed and approved by the chancellor. The message will be conveyed to internal audiences via e-mail, via the website and via broadcast voice mail. External audiences will be notified through press releases and press conferences (if needed). A statement will be prepared and recorded for the CTC Hotline (501-3100), and all internal and external communication will direct the public to call that number or check the CTC website for updates. A call center will be set up and staffed through IT Customer Services as necessary. Locations-at-a-distance will determine procedures for student and staff/faculty notification at their location.
4. Based on the nature of the incident, the community relations director may set up a media communications center or media emergency center as necessary at the Planetarium (Bldg. 152), unless otherwise indicated. All media will be directed to assemble at the center to work and receive information. A designated spokesperson will issue periodic statements to the media.
5. The community relations director or coordinator will conduct all communications with the media and set up press conferences as required. Whenever possible, the press will be fully informed of all particulars as soon as they become known, provided there is nothing to preclude release. The designated college spokesperson will make all official announcements to the media. The Community Relations Department will coordinate with appropriate staff for input and response. Procedures for locations-at-a-distance will vary based on the situation.

6. Grief counseling, mental health services, support groups, memorial services, safety seminars, posters and brochures offering safety tips and hotline numbers that provide information to family members will be established depending on the nature of the crisis. Notification of such services will be done through the Community Relations Department.