Emergency Notification, Response and Evacuation

Policy Type: Administrative
Responsible Office: Virginia Commonwealth University Policy Department, Division of Administration
Initial Policy Approved: 12/01/2011
Current Revision Approved: 1/22/2018

Policy Statement and Purpose

As required by the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act), this policy outlines the university’s procedures for prompt emergency notification, response and potential evacuation, upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students, faculty or staff occurring on the university’s campuses.

Pursuant to this policy, the vice president for administration and/or the chief of the VCU Police department, provides the university community, without delay, emergency notification and response, upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students, faculty or staff occurring on the VCU campuses, so that they may take reasonable precautions for their safety.

In accordance with the university’s Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP), university officials coordinate the emergency notification, response and evacuation of the community, as needed, in the event of an emergency. The CEMP addresses several types of potential emergencies with respective response plans and unit plans. The activation and use of the CEMP’s Incident Coordination Team (ICT) is based on the facts and circumstances present and known by senior leadership. These officials also test the emergency response and evacuation procedures annually and publicize the procedures throughout the community. Individuals who are responsible for executing these procedures include, but are not limited to the:

- President of the university
- Vice president for administration (ICT Leader under the CEMP)
- Chief of police and/or VCU Police department designee

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.
Who Should Know This Policy

VCU students, faculty and staff

Definitions

Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP)
The VCU CEMP provides the structures and processes for coordinating incident management activities for natural and human caused emergencies and disasters. Following the guidance provided by the National Response Framework (NRF), National Incident Management System (NIMS), and other supporting documents, the CEMP creates an umbrella configuration for existing department emergency and incident management plans.

Incident Coordination Team (ICT)
The ICT consists of senior management from various operating disciplines across the university. The ICT evaluates the institutional effects of an emergency, determines business recovery and resumption priorities overseen by the ICT leader, and executes the CEMP.

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)
VCU’s COOP identifies the critical and time-sensitive missions, applications, processes, and functions to be recovered and continued in an emergency or disaster, including alternate operating capabilities.

Contacts

The vice president for administration, the chief of the VCU Police department, and the vice president for the Division of University Relations officially interpret this policy. Pursuant to the policy Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures, the vice president for administration, the chief of the VCU Police department, and the vice president for the Division of University Relations are responsible for obtaining approval for any policy revisions through the appropriate governance structures. Please direct policy questions to the VCU Police department.
Policy Specifics and Procedures

Notification and response procedures

Because an emergency may be sudden and without warning, the procedures outlined below are designed to provide flexibility in order to accommodate facts, institutional needs, and other contingencies of various types and magnitudes, and to allow for the development of an appropriate university response designed to protect the VCU community.

1. The VCU Police department is the entity that responds to incidents and determines whether a significant emergency or dangerous situation is occurring or is imminent on VCU's campuses, which constitutes an immediate threat to the health and safety of students, faculty, staff or guests. The VCU Police department determines the existence of such a situation in consultation with other university offices, such as Facilities Management, the Office of Safety and Risk Management, the Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs, University Student Health Services, the National Weather Service, and/or responding law enforcement or fire departments, as necessary.

2. The vice president for administration and/or the chief of police, will, without delay, and taking into account the safety of the community, determine the content of the emergency notification message and activate the components of the emergency communications system, unless issuing a notification will, in their professional judgment, compromise efforts to assist a victim or to contain, respond to, or otherwise mitigate the emergency.

3. Each emergency notification will include all of the following:
   a. Specific information about the nature of the incident/threat
   b. Directions about how students, faculty, staff, and guests should respond to the threat
   c. Details on what to do to get additional information

4. In situations in which the vice president for administration and the chief of police are unavailable, or where any delay would significantly increase the risk to the VCU community, the on-duty police supervisor is authorized to determine the necessity of an emergency notification message, develop an emergency notification message, and activate the text message system. In such instances, the on-duty police supervisor will notify the chief of police as soon as practicable, who will brief the vice president for administration.

5. After reviewing the emergency situation, the vice president for administration (acting as the ICT Leader) will decide whether to declare an emergency and activate VCU's CEMP, and a determination will be made regarding the level of emergency declared.

6. Officials from the VCU Police department and/or University Relations will provide regular follow-up information to the community, as needed.
VCU emergency communications system

The university utilizes a multichannel communications system to provide timely warnings/crime alerts and emergency notifications to the university community. In the event of an impending or actual emergency on campus, one or more of the following communication channels will be activated:

- **Outdoor Siren System** - The outdoor siren system consists of multiple sirens that are strategically located across both campuses. Siren tests are performed on a monthly basis.

- **VCU Alert website** – The university’s Alert website can be accessed online at alert.vcu.edu. The website is updated regularly with information and instructions regarding how to respond in an emergency situation. This link can also be accessed from the university’s homepage.

- **Alertus** – The small yellow devices are strategically installed in residence halls, all classrooms that house more than twenty (20) students, and other high-volume areas throughout campus. The devices are designed to transmit audio and visual alerts, as well as a protective action statement that will scroll on the screen.

- **Text messages** - These messages provide short protective action statements that will contain a link to the alert.vcu.edu website in order to gather more information. VCU students, faculty and staff may subscribe to the VCU Alert text messaging through the university’s main login screen. Parents and community members also may sign up for the university’s text message alert system to receive information about campus emergencies and cancellations.

- **Digital Signage** - Digital displays are located in major academic buildings, the Student Commons, and in all residential housing facilities on both campuses. The signs will display the emergency alert and reference information that is posted to Alertus boxes and text messaging.

- **Mass Email** – All VCU email account holders will receive an email containing safety recommendations related to the event. If only a segment or portion of the university community needs to be informed, an emergency notification will be sent via email to the relevant segment of the university community.

- **Social Media** – Alerting information will be posted to the @VCUNews Twitter account and the VCU Facebook page.

- **Fire Alarm System** – This system may be used for evacuation of a specific segment of the university community.

- **Desktop Alerts** - Most VCU-supported computers provide full-screen notifications on computer workstations located in offices, laboratories, classrooms, and study spaces throughout the university. These messages will contain protective action statements related to the event.

- **LiveSafe** - All VCU LiveSafe users will receive a “push” message through the VCU LiveSafe application that will also contain protective action statements related to the emergency situation.

If any of the above technology systems fail, the university may initiate face-to-face communication using building managers, residence life staff, and other appropriate faculty, staff, and students on campus.
Emergency evacuation procedures

The VCU Police department is the entity that coordinates the safe evacuation of all persons utilizing university facilities in the event of fire, bomb threat, power outage, other natural disasters, civil disturbances, and active or imminent threats. The level of necessity for evacuation will determine the appropriate response by the VCU Police department and other university partners. If large-scale events occur that are beyond the resource capabilities of the VCU Police department and the university, the chief of police may request assistance from outside agencies, such as the City of Richmond Police Department and Richmond Fire and Emergency Department, Virginia State Police, and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, as needed.

Testing and exercise procedures

To maintain the university’s emergency management capability, VCU conducts various announced and unannounced exercises and drills each year. In accordance with the VCU Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), VCU will utilize the procedures below for testing institutional responses for emergency notification, response, and evacuation.

Training, Testing and Exercises

The university has a well-developed CEMP and an all-hazard COOP training, testing, and exercise program. VCU annually certifies completion of plan updates and execution of tests on CEMP and COOP plans in the event of natural or man-made disasters, including terrorist attacks. University emergency response and facility evacuation procedures are both publicized and tested at least annually.

After Action Review (AAR) and Improvement Plan

AAR will be conducted following each emergency event or exercise on a planning scenario. The formal AAR should be completed on emergency events and exercises within 60 days, and Improvement Plans will be included or recommended in formal AAR documents. Any subsequent COOP or CEMP modifications that result from the AAR process will be incorporated, as necessary, into applicable response plans.

Forms

There are no forms associated with this policy and procedures.

Related Documents

   http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?type=simple;c=ecfr;cc=ecfr;sid=54da22f8ac207179cde8180bfd795efc;idno=34#region
2. VCU Policy: *Timely Warning/Crime Alert*

**Revision History**

This policy supersedes the following archived policies:

- **12/01/2011**  
  *Emergency Notification, Response and Evacuation*

- **1/08/2014**  
  *Emergency Notification, Response and Evacuation*

**FAQ**

There are no FAQ associated with this policy and procedures.