

PROCEDURES MEMORANDUM

TO: MCC Staff

FROM: Office of the President

SUBJECT: Crisis Communication Plan

DATE: November 28, 2023

PURPOSE: To establish general procedures for communicating crises/emergencies to the college community, the news media, and the general public.

SCOPE: This policy applies to all college employees (full-time, part-time, regular and/or temporary).

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

Under the *Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act* (Clery Act), 20 U.S.C. §§1092(f) et seq., if the Metropolitan Community College Police Department (MCCPD) determines that there is a serious or continuing threat to the college community, the MCCPD, in conjunction with the Crisis Communication Team, is responsible for issuing a timely warning. In addition, the MCCPD is required to send an emergency notification if there is an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or employees on any college premises. The purpose of this Procedures Memorandum is to ensure compliance with the Clery Act, to provide notice and information to the college community and to establish basic procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency. This document should be a flexible blueprint to use to communicate during a crisis.

MCCPD coordinates emergency management planning for all MCC owned or controlled locations. Various departments throughout the college community contribute to the College's emergency operations plan. MCC Procedures Memoranda X-7 (Emergency/Crisis Situations) and X-29 (Crisis Communication Plan) list procedures to be used to provide guidance for immediate response and the ensuing recovery process in the event of an emergency. MCCPD uses the National Incident Management (NIMS) System for managing emergency events.

When a threatening or dangerous situation is reported to MCCPD, the chief of police, or his or her designee, will coordinate a timely review of the circumstances surrounding the situation to determine if the incident represents a continuing threat to the safety of the college community that would merit an emergency notification or timely warning. When the determination has been made that an emergency notification or timely warning should be issued, (if time permits) the Crisis Communication Team will inform the college community of the incident.

This PM does not change the way emergencies are initially reported. All emergencies should be reported to 911 before taking any other action(s). The processes for handling various emergencies are covered in PM X-7 and the Emergency Procedures Handbook, which can be accessed online under the Faculty and Staff Resource Center on the college website.

1. Definitions

Crisis – A crisis is any situation that threatens the security, safety, integrity or reputation of MCC. Examples include crimes and natural or human-created disasters. Poor or ineffective communication during a crisis endangers the college community, diminishes good will with the public and damages the College’s reputation.

Timely warning – A timely warning is an announcement to the college community and beyond, which is triggered when MCCPD determines that a crime for which it must report Clery statistics presents a serious or continuing threat to students and employees. Because the nature of criminal threats often is not limited to a single location, timely warnings must be issued in a manner likely to reach the entire college community.

Emergency notification – An emergency notification is an announcement by the MCCPD in conjunction with the Crisis Communication Team that is released upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health and safety of the college community and beyond. Notifications are to be issued without delay upon confirmation of the existence of a dangerous situation by MCCPD. Emergency notifications can be differentiated from timely warnings in that they usually involve non-criminal incidents such as weather-related emergencies or other disaster incidents such as chemical spills.

2. How to determine if crisis communication is needed

When an MCC employee identifies a possible crisis, they first must determine whether or not they should call emergency services (911). If so, they should call emergency services before doing anything else. The person should then call MCCPD. MCCPD will notify the office of the president, and the president, or his or her designee, will make the decision whether to activate the Crisis Communications Team or not.

3. The Crisis Communication Team

The Crisis Communication Team identifies what communication actions should be taken and should create a plan of action to deal with crisis communication needs. The team is comprised of key people who are empowered to quickly make decisions for the College. Since the plan is action oriented, the team is small and will confer with other college personnel as needed. The team generally includes the following:

- A. The president
- B. Chief of staff
- C. College marketing officer
- D. Chief of police
- E. Others as designated or needed

In the event the president and chief of staff are both unavailable, the vice president with primary responsibility for the affected area will direct the team and has the authority to call on any college resources as necessary.

4. Timely warnings

Timely warning alerts provide notification to the MCC community in the event that a crime, as defined under the Clery Act guidelines, has been reported to MCCPD or local law enforcement agencies which, in the opinion of the chief of police, poses a serious or continuing threat to the safety and well-being of the MCC community. Such threat can be either on or off college premises.

The Clery Act defines crimes that may warrant the issuance of a timely warning alert as criminal homicide, sex offenses, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, motor vehicle theft, arson, hate crimes, persons with weapons with intent to use, threats of violent crimes and situations where the suspect is not known.

The Crisis Communication Team will direct the preparation and issuance of a timely warning alert that may be communicated to the MCC community via various methods, which may include text messages, email messages, computer messages, posts to the MCC website, MCCPD web page, news media, social media, written flyers, public address systems, digital signage, Alertus beacon, outdoor sirens or other method(s) as may be deemed appropriate under the circumstances.

If there is a possibility that the crime or other incident may have an effect beyond college premises, the Crisis Communication Team will determine if it is necessary and appropriate to communicate the timely warning alert to the general public. The timely warning alert may be communicated to the general public via various communication methods, which may include text messages, email messages, computer messages, posts to the MCC website, MCCPD web page, news media, social media, written flyers, public address systems, digital signage, Alertus beacon, outdoor sirens or other method(s) as may be deemed appropriate under the circumstances.

The intent of the timely warning alert is to enable members of the campus community and the general public to protect themselves. A timely warning alert should include information that promotes safety and aids in the prevention of similar crimes. The alert may include, but is not limited to:

- A brief statement describing the incident
- The possible connection to other incidents, if applicable
- The physical description of the suspect(s), if available
- The date and time of the incident
- Other relevant information

The Crisis Communication Team will communicate the appointment of a communications spokesperson and the individual responsible for issuing the Emergency Alert update messages, if necessary.

If local (non-MCC) law enforcement authorities issue a news release or other alert about an off-campus crime that represents a potential threat to the safety of the MCC community, the Crisis Communication Team may issue a timely warning alert if warranted under the circumstances.

MCC will deliver timely warning alerts via text message to those employees and students who are registered with the MCC emergency notification text messaging system. Non-registered employees and students are encouraged to sign up for this service.

MCCPD will determine when the threat is over.

5. Emergency notifications

In the event of a threatening situation, the MCCPD in conjunction with the Crisis Communication Team will, after taking into account the safety of the college community, issue emergency notifications to any and all parts of the college community that may be affected, unless it has been determined that issuing such an alert would hinder efforts to help victims and/or contain the situation.

The intent of the emergency notification is to enable members of the campus community and the general public to protect themselves. An emergency notification should include information that promotes safety and aids in the prevention of similar crimes. The alert may include, but not be limited to:

- A brief statement describing the incident
- The possible connection to other incidents, if applicable
- The physical description of the suspect(s), if available
- The date and time of the incident
- Other relevant information

Notifications shall be distributed via MCC emergency notification system, which may include text messages, email messages, computer messages, posts to the MCC website, MCCPD web page, news media, social media, written flyers, public address systems, digital signage, Alertus beacon, outdoor sirens or other method(s) as may be deemed appropriate under the circumstances.

MCC will deliver emergency notifications timely warning alerts via text message to those employees and students who are registered with the MCC emergency notification text messaging system. Non-registered employees and students are encouraged to sign up for this service at <https://www.mccneb.edu/About-MCC-Nebraska/Police/MCC-Emergency-Notification-System> .

Upon the occurrence of a possible emergency, the chief of police, or an on-duty MCCPD supervisor, in consultation with the president and/or chief of staff, will be responsible for determining whether or not the situation poses an immediate threat to the health or safety of the college community. If the determination is made that an immediate threat to the health or safety of the college community does exist, the Crisis Communication Team will determine the content of the warning and mode of communication. In determining whether or not the situation is an emergency, the responsible party shall take into account issues such as the nature of the threat, whether the threat will be ongoing and the number of people affected. When deciding the content of the emergency notification, the Crisis Communication Team will determine what and how much information should be released and who is to be notified.

Examples of potential emergency situations include but are not limited to:

- Fire
- Bomb threat
- Civil disturbance
- Chemical spill/hazard
- Act of violence with ongoing threats to campus
- Tornadoes

6. Initial response – Crisis Communication Team

The Crisis Communication Team should gather information, identify constituencies that need to be informed and identify key information to communicate. The Crisis Communication Team should develop a plan of action that includes some of the following:

- A. Designate a spokesperson – Depending on the type of crisis, this could be the president, the chief of staff, the college marketing officer, or a different designee who possesses knowledge of the incident. For example, the chief of police may respond best on a crime incident, the president may be best to restore public confidence and the college marketing officer may handle day-to-day media questions.
- B. Draft a fact sheet – This should be a summary statement that includes all known details to be released to the media. The fact sheet should be balanced between the public’s right to know and concerns for student privacy and security.
- C. Identify and notify key constituencies – Effective communications stop rumors, restore morale and help maintain continued orderly operation of the College. Key constituencies could be:
 - 1) MCC students and employees
 - 2) Families of MCC students and employees
 - 3) Board of Governors
 - 4) News media
 - 5) General public
 - 6) Vendors
 - 7) Accreditation agencies

D. Identify methods of communication based on the constituencies. Different crises warrant different methods of communication to key constituencies. Some methods to consider include:

- 1) Text
- 2) Email

E. Determine if the situation requires establishing a crisis communications center.

F. Develop a media plan if needed.

7. Crisis communication center facility needs

If the crisis is of sufficient magnitude to require setting up a media briefing area, the following describes the system/facility needs:

- A. Cell and land phone lines; audio/visual and Internet capability; and space for up to 50 people. Rooms that can serve this purpose are the board meeting room in Building 21 on the Fort Omaha Campus and the large meeting room at the Center for Advanced Manufacturing at the South Omaha Campus. Consideration should be given to placement of the crisis communication center facility in an area away from the affected area.
- B. Power and communication ability should also be a consideration. If power is not available because of damage or inaccessibility, portable generators will be arranged through Facilities Management at the designated college location.
- C. A dedicated phone line to respond to media inquiries. This is useful when other phone lines are tied up due to the crisis.
- D. A list of the crisis communication team and the crisis support team, maintained by the chief of police. The list should include cell phone numbers, home phone, work number and email addresses, both at home and work. The list is distributed annually to campus directors, police officers, deans and other key personnel.
- E. A current list of public information officers representing law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, health organizations and governmental entities in the four-county service area along with necessary state and federal bodies. The Office of Marketing, Brand and Communication shall maintain this list.

Adopted 7/12/05; Revised 9/27/06; 9/22/08; 11/17/09; 11/4/10; 10/30/13, 8/27/14; 11/17/16, 1/10/18, 8/10/2022; 11/28/23 updated link for emergency notification system only