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LESSON LEARNED

School Emergency Management Planning: Using Multiple Communication Methods During Incidents at Schools

SUMMARY

Higher education institutions should develop plans to use multiple communications methods to inform students, faculty, and staff members of an incident. This can help to ensure that different communities within the school are informed of an incident simultaneously.

DESCRIPTION

On February 14, 2008, Stephen Kazmierczak, a Northern Illinois University (NIU) graduate, killed 5 students, wounded 18, and committed suicide on the NIU campus in DeKalb, Illinois. Kazmierczak suffered from bipolar disorder and had displayed suicidal behaviors prior to the incident. At approximately 3:03 p.m., Kazmierczak entered the Cole Hall Auditorium during a class and began shooting at faculty and students. After firing 60 rounds, Kazmierczak committed suicide in the Cole Hall Auditorium. The NIU Public Affairs Office began issuing emergency alert messages 14 minutes after the NIU Department of Public Safety received the first emergency call about the shooting. Throughout the response, these emergency alert messages provided vital information to students, faculty, and staff members, including the incident's nature and protective action recommendations.

NIU is located in DeKalb, Illinois, 65 miles west of Chicago. Its 755-acre main campus hosts approximately 22,000 students. DeKalb has a population of 43,714, not including NIU.

NIU Public Affairs Office personnel employed a robust and redundant communications network to send emergency alert messages simultaneously to multiple on-campus Internet locations, such as Web pages. Office personnel promptly posted uniform emergency alert messages on various NIU Internet pages. In addition, the office activated a telephone hotline at the onset of the incident response. The hotline received more than 10,000 phone calls from parents, families, and others over a 48-hour period. Integrating multiple communication methods allowed the NIU Public Affairs Office to expedite the dissemination of vital information during response operations. This helped NIU provide accurate information to students, faculty, and staff in a timely fashion.

The NIU Public Affairs Office relied on six additional computer servers to manage the sudden and high volume of communication during the incident. It had purchased the servers upon the recommendation of Virginia Tech Public Affairs Office personnel. The Virginia Tech personnel suggested that additional servers would help prevent the collapse of NIU's Internet pages during an incident when demand would increase dramatically.

On April 16, 2007, a Virginia Tech student killed 32 students and faculty members, wounded 17 more, and then killed himself in two separate incidents on Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus. For more information, refer to the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Lesson Learned, [Campus Safety: Dispatching Timely and Clear Emergency Alert Messages](#).

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CITATION

U.S. Fire Administration. *Northern Illinois University Shooting*. 04 Aug 2009.
<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=37994>

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