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LESSON LEARNED

Campus Emergency Planning: Familiarizing Faculty and Staff with their Emergency Public Information Roles and Responsibilities

SUMMARY

University officials should provide emergency communications information for all staff and faculty members to ensure they are familiar with the public information process and their roles and responsibilities during an emergency.

DESCRIPTION

On August 8, 2008, the Ohio Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Homeland Security sponsored the Cleveland State University (CSU) tabletop exercise (TTX). The TTX tested the response concepts, plans, and capabilities for responding to campus shootings and hostage situations at CSU. The TTX scenario detailed two shootings at different locations on the CSU campus, culminating in a hostage situation at the campus library. TTX objectives included the evaluation of communications plans and procedures at CSU as well as CSU's ability to disseminate accurate information to the public using all facets of the media. Forty-six participants from ten federal, state, and local agencies participated in the TTX.

TTX participants stated that they did not know the existing emergency communication plan or policy at CSU, while university officials indicated that they were uncertain about information dissemination processes. Participants commented that they often rely on previous experiences to determine their actions during a crisis rather than on university policies. Exercise evaluators observed that it did not seem that the TTX public information participants possessed a copy of the written CSU policy. Further, participants suggested that staff members would be unlikely to know how to report a threatening or disruptive student.

The TTX after-action report (AAR) recommended that CSU update its campus emergency communications information and distribute it to all staff and faculty members. This would ensure that these personnel are familiar with public information processes and their roles and responsibilities during an incident. The AAR noted that campus emergency communications plans should reflect the most current university policies and procedures. The report noted that it is essential for all staff members to be familiar with the plans. The AAR also suggested designing and implementing standard media press releases that could be given within the first critical time periods following an incident.

University officials should provide emergency communications information for all staff and faculty members to ensure they are familiar with the public information process and their roles and responsibilities during an emergency.

CITATION

Cleveland State University and Department of Homeland Security. *Cleveland State University Tabletop Exercise After Action Report/Improvement Plan*. 17 Jun 2008.

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