

**Rutgers University**  
**Senate Budget and Finance Committee**  
**Report and Recommendations on Emergency Communication Processes**

January 2010

**The Charge**

**S-0803 Rutgers Emergency Communication Processes**

Investigate and make recommendations on communication processes used to inform students, faculty, and staff about what to do in various emergency situations. These situations may include bomb threats, fires, chemical spills, and individuals with weapons. Consult with Vice President for Student Affairs Gregory Blimling, Executive Director for Public Safety Jay Kohl, and Senior Director of Campus Information Services Matt Weismantel on this issue. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by November 2008.

**Introduction**

Many types of campus emergencies require communication with the university community. These include but are not limited to:

Fires	Bomb threats
Chemical spills	Shootings
Police activity near campus	Hostage situations

These situations can be considered public emergencies that threaten a large number of people and/or a significant amount of university property. All persons involved with protecting the Rutgers University community should try to prevent these emergencies and limit the amount of injury when prevention efforts fail. This requires efficient communication with students, faculty, staff, emergency personnel and other visitors to the campus. Communication procedures should provide a plan for contacting persons on campus as well as those planning to visit. Currently Rutgers has systems that target both of these groups.

Rutgers University emergency communication procedures include:

911 dispatch	Text messaging
PA systems	Mass emails
The university website	Blackboard
Rutgers Police Department	Campus safety officers
Fire alarms	Bullhorns
Police radios	Television
Reverse 911 systems	

Campus emergencies are varied and each requires an approach tailored to the groups involved. For example, in the event of a school shooting getting information to the university community on campus is critical. This differs from a snowstorm where administrators are

trying to reach students who are off-campus. Because school shootings unfold more quickly and with less warning than a snowstorm, email and text messaging systems are not enough. Proper and efficient communication regarding building evacuation procedures or lockdowns will help shield students from danger. Whatever the emergency, each procedure should be well defined, made public, and practiced.

The Rutgers University Senate Budget and Finance Committee met with the following individuals to assess the emergency communication processes in place. A short summary of the information obtained is provided in this report.

Gregory Blimling - Vice President for Student Affairs  
Jay Kohl - Executive Director for Public Safety  
Matt Weismantel - Senior Director of Campus Information Services  
Mary Beth Daisey - Associate Chancellor of Student Affairs (Camden)  
Guy Still - Chief of Police RU Police Department (Camden)  
Michael Lattimore - Director of Public Safety (Newark)

### **Campus Communication Procedures**

*Excerpt from memorandum written by Jay Kohl dated 19 October 2007:*

*Campus Information Services (CIS) plays a primary role in disseminating emergency information to the University community, including the announcement of delayed openings, office closings, and class cancellations. The following methods are used to disseminate such information:*

- *New Brunswick Campus Operating Status Page—<http://campusstatus.rutgers.edu>
  - *This web page is posted when adverse weather conditions are present or expected on campus and will include information on office closings, class cancellations, bus schedules, parking lot availability, and dining hall and recreation/student center hours of operation. The Rutgers-New Brunswick website, <http://nbp.rutgers.edu>, will maintain links to the Campus Operating Status Page**
- *RU-info Channel (RU-tv Channel 3 on the New Brunswick Campus)*
- *Mass Email Messages are sent to the New Brunswick Campus when office closings and/or class cancellations take place*
- *RU-info Call Center – 732-932-INFO (includes a 24-hour voicemail announcement system)*
- *Cell Phone Notification System
  - *The University community can sign up to receive notifications on the text message enabled cell phones by going to <http://alerts.rutgers.edu>.**

The excerpt above details numerous avenues of communication available to the New Brunswick campus. In general, most of these procedures rely on some form of technology for information dissemination (i.e., phones, cell phones, television and computers). It is clear that the systems in place are well equipped to deal with typical emergencies such as campus closures due to inclement weather. These systems can also be used in atypical emergency

situations such as shootings and hostage situations to relay information to persons on campus as well as those planning to visit. Because atypical emergencies unfold quickly, some of these communication processes may not be adequate for disseminating information to those away from their computers and phones.

Atypical emergencies such as hostage situations and individuals with weapons have their own line of communication amongst various law enforcement agencies. RUPD is the first responder for all New Brunswick emergencies. After the situation has been assessed, central command will determine if additional officers from nearby municipalities are needed to control the situation. The agreement between RUPD and other agencies is known as “mutual aid.” At least 13 departments and agencies have entered into a mutual aid agreement with the New Brunswick campus. These include but are not limited to: East Brunswick, Edison, the FBI, Highland Park, Middlesex, New Brunswick, Piscataway, the Prosecutor’s Office, the Sherriff’s Department, South Brunswick, the State Police and UMDNJ. Rutgers has also established a link with the National Guard for catastrophic events. The mutual aid agreement basically provides the campus with additional officers to help control crowds, disseminate information and prevent further injury.

The Rutgers-Newark campus uses many of the same emergency communication procedures as New Brunswick. These include mass emails, text messages, bullhorns and the Rutgers-Newark website. In addition to these systems, the Newark campus has installed a reverse 911 system that can be used to respond to on-campus emergencies. The reverse 911 system works by calling all campus phones simultaneously. For example, if there was a bomb threat, RUPD could use this system to send a voice message to every land-line on campus. In essence, any person who picked up the phone would hear detailed information about the problem and instructions on what to do. Because the Newark campus is located in an urban environment, interagency cooperation between law enforcement officials in the city is important. The Rutgers-Newark Police Department has a good working relationships with the Newark Police Department and the other university police departments in the city. They also monitor the radio calls of these police departments as emergencies in Newark can easily move from one campus to another.

The Rutgers-Camden campus in the heart of the City of Camden. As such, it is a participant in the larger Camden County emergency management structure and community. This community consists of local county state and federal first responders. Like the other campuses, Rutgers-Camden uses instant messaging, email, and web communication modalities. Camden also employs a flat-screen digital messaging system. This system is deployed in all its “major” classroom and office buildings. The screens are centrally located in high visibility areas and are easily accessible to all who enter through the main entrances. These screens are centrally controlled and could be used to transmit emergency notices. Rutgers-Camden also has in place a system of building managers. The managers and their committees are trained to respond to a variety of emergencies, and their training is updated regularly . Camden also has a newly installed, centrally controlled public address system. This system has the ability to cover the entire campus and is augmented by police vehicles which, while patrolling, can broadcast emergency messages in remote, off-campus parking locations

More information about campus emergency communication procedures can be found at: <http://www.nj.gov/njhomelandsecurity/press-room/press-releases/2007/10-02-07-campus-security.pdf>

### **Recommendations**

The University Senate Budget and Finance Committee recommends the following with regard to deployment of emergency communication:

1. Establish a network of building safety officers who will be in continuous contact with the RU police in the event of an emergency.
  - a. Building safety officers would likely be volunteers who work in the building to which they are assigned.
  - b. These officers would be trained on how to implement the emergency communication required to accomplish actions such as evacuation or lockdown of their building(s).
  - c. If fiscally feasible, safety officers should have wireless contact with RUPD that will enable them to receive instructions during an emergency.
2. The university should post a website that will provide detailed information regarding emergency communication and procedures. These should be multi-faceted and provide information about what do during any type of emergency.
3. The university should conduct “information” exercises to ensure the campus community knows how to react and comply with the emergency communication. These drills will better prepare students for an emergency. They may also reduce panic and chaos in the event of a real emergency. These exercises should not disrupt student learning and would preferably be executed during the month of September or close to the beginning of the academic year.
4. The university should establish a protocol for displaying emergency messages on Rutgers buses and at Rutgers bus stops. The electronic displays used to indicate when the next bus will arrive or the final destination of a bus could communicate relevant information to students during an emergency.
5. The emergency communication should also reach those who are on in close vicinity and are on their way to campus. The university administration should asses the possibility of using electronic signs to warn drivers about any ongoing campus emergencies or closures. This would mimic the “Amber Alert” program used across the nation to help locate children who have been kidnapped. For campus emergencies, this technology could keep commuters from driving onto campus if it is too dangerous, or if it is closed.
6. The university should develop an emergency procedures packet that would be distributed to students at the start of each school year. This information should also be posted on the university website. The packet would detail what to do if there were a campus emergency, and would outline the communication procedures the university might use to contact students in emergency situations.