Developing a Crisis Management Plan in the Wake of the Virginia Tech Tragedy

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Question: Are you prepared?
- If a school shooter sets out to kill 35 students on your campus, would your campus be prepared to respond?
- Do you have a plan in place that will help your institution survive "national scrutiny?"

What Comes to Mind as "National Scrutiny"
- Media Scrutiny
- FEMA Compliance Requirements

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Federal Government Scrutiny and Compliance

- Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) requires all of us to now adopt an all-hazards approach which incorporates National Incident Management System (NIMS) principles.
- Basically implies that we have a crisis management plan that complies in language and structure with Presidential Directive 5.
- Part of the NIMS principles includes written pre-event planning.

Why do we need a plan?

- Failing to have a plan can result in a delayed response.
- Delayed responses can facilitate increased injuries, death, damage, financial losses, and with each of these — possible litigation.

Why do we need a plan?

- With each new serious incident on a college campus (i.e. VA Tech), institutions of higher-ed incur foreseeability — arguing that no one thought it could happen 'here' will not be an effective defense.
Foreseeability

- Negligence can be determined if the incident was foreseeable.
- Is there any past history in regard to what happened in the incident that would have been an indication that a person could be "injured" in the future?
- If so, there is foreseeability and you should take corrective action before a second incident occurs.
- If you do not, you and the College could be held liable for being negligent.

The midst of a crisis is not the time to establish relationships with responding agencies, sharpen your response skills, or learn about ICS.

- A significant crisis can serve as an "unannounced" and "unforgiving" inventory of your resources, training, relationships, and skills.

Crisis Planning vs. Crisis Procedures

- Crisis plans of the past were laden with step by step procedures, names, and specifics.
- These hyper-detailed manuals create three noteworthy problems:

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Problems with old plans

- #1 - The girth of the manual becomes so large that no one reads it or can quickly locate information.

Problems with old plans

- #2 - These long procedures are seldom updated — and many plans still reflect a pre-Columbine, pre-9/11, pre VA-Tech world.

Problems with old plans

- #3 - The names and titles change faster than the updates.

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Modern crisis plans

- A modern, compliant crisis plan needs to be:
  - Easy to use
  - Easy to update
  - Use common terminology and universal titles

Structure of a good (compliant) campus crisis management plan

- NIMS mandates the use of ICS
- Structure
  - Incident Commander
  - Sections
  - Incident Typing
  - ICP (Incident Command Post)

What is ICS?

- ICS is the "Incident Command System"
- ICS originally developed in the 70's by the Fire Service
- ICS solves the interoperability and communication challenges faced during multi-agency responses by using common terminology and procedures
- ICS is MODULAR
- ICS solves uses measurable objectives
- ICS can help break up mental gridlock and "whose in charge?" dilemmas
Example of ICS Structure

Incident Commander
- Not the highest ranking college official!
- The IC is chosen based on who is present and who possesses the most expertise at that specific time
- Responsible for overall incident management
- Assessing incident priorities
- Evaluating needed resources
- Coordinating with other agencies

Sections
- Operations - manage tactical operations, establish control (responders directly fixing)
- Planning - evaluating and analyzing information about incident, plan strategies (big picture)
- Logistics - providing services and supplies (support)
- Finance - cost analysis, expense tracking

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Administrative Framework – Incident Typing

- Type 5 – single dimension, single resource, easily contained (i.e. injured person, vehicle fire)
- Type 4 – single dimension, may need limited outside resources, no additional sections needed (i.e. small fuel spill, fire in room)
- Type 3 – multi-dimensional incidents, complex, need outside resources (i.e. bomb threats, racially motivated assault)
- Type 2 – multiple-dimensional and large scale, most or all Sections open, usually exceeding campus (i.e. severe regional storm)
- Type 1 – national resources are required, multiple operational periods, is far beyond campus ability to respond

Plan should identify structure, sections plus responsibilities, and the ICP

- The ICP is the Incident Command Post.
- The plan should pre-designate likely spots for the ICP.
- The ICP must have phone lines, radios, computer network connection, large scale map, fax, television / radio monitoring capability.

II. Response Framework

- The second portion of a crisis plan should include response information (not a procedural manual)
- Planner sheets, ICS 201 / 202 – something with incident objectives
- Make sure your plan includes recovery strategies
Communications Plan

- Your plan should have a pre-determined format for communicating emergency information to your community (i.e. NY-Alert, e-mail, siren)

- Lesson learned from VA Tech:
  - VA Tech had just begun planning their emergency communications upgrade shortly before incident
  - VA Tech used emergency message included language that appeared to some as too vague

- The format and protocol for emergency communications should be a special section of crisis plan – and should not employ "committee-style" decision making.

Contacts

- Contacts of key personnel should be maintained on a separate list.
- A separate list allows for faster updates and quick referencing.
- Person responsible for updating contacts should be identified and written into plan.

Appendices

- Procedures and incident-specific planning belongs as an appendix – they are essential and critical.
- Examples of good appendices include:
  - active shooter plans;
  - shelter in place;
  - pandemic flu plans;
  - haz/mat spills; or
  - campus evacuation plans.
Sum total of having a plan

- When a campus puts these items together, the resulting plan is:
  - compliant with current federal requirements
  - provides a solid foundation for an effective response.
  - Form a campus crisis planning committee

Steps toward Prevention, Preparation and Response

#1 Re-affirm partnerships
- Share your crisis management plan with outside support agencies
- Establish MOUs with local emergency responders
- Confirm availability of specialty responders such as bomb squads, haz-mat, county/state emergency managers
- Identify suppliers of logistical support
- Practice with your partners

#2 Assess
- Inventory and type your resources
- Update your crisis plan
- Update your contact lists
- Check your proximity to external hazards such as nearby power plants, government buildings, or desirable terrorist targets (hazards analysis)
- Drill to test your readiness
- Is your plan available in both hard copy and electronic versions?

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#3 Stay informed & prevent

- Keep abreast of the latest threats and developments
- Provide mechanisms for concerned students or staff to report suspicious behavior or conditions
- Proactively communicate
- Proactively manage incidents with potential to escalate

Critical preventative campus wide policy issues

- Student & Employee Discipline – acts of violence, weapons
- Mental Health – considering student with mental health issues
- Involuntary Withdrawal policies
- 24 hour locked residence halls?

Need (Requirement) to Drill

- Monday morning quarterback drill
- Table top drill
- Full drills
- Pitfalls to avoid for each
- Play Incident Commander!!
Compliance includes training!

- The plan is part of compliance. Training is required.
- Who needs to complete training
  - All potential Incident Commanders or Section Chiefs (i.e. Vice Presidents, University Police personnel, EHS personnel, PR Director, Health Services Director, Counseling Director, Facilities Director)
- http://training.fema.gov/IS/crslist.asp
- ICS-100, ICS-200, ICS-700
- Also ICS-300, ICS-400, ICS-800 for select personnel