

ADMINISTRATOR-ON-CALL SYSTEM

William R. Koch
East Carolina University

Abstract

The University recently implemented an Administrator-on-Call (AOC) policy to ensure that a qualified and duly authorized executive level administrator is available to respond to emergencies during nights, weekends and holidays. Previously, the Vice Chancellors for Student Life and Administration and Finance were contacted for all emergencies. Initially, the divisions of Student Life and Administration and Finance developed separate on-call programs to help relieve the burden on the Vice Chancellors. The two on-call coordinators quickly realized that it would be advantageous to join forces to create one on-call program and did so this past year. Combining the programs resulted in the elimination of redundancy, increased on-call coverage, and increased efficiency by adopting best practices from both systems. The AOC program utilizes a single cell phone that can be easily activated by the campus police and an informational binder complete with emergency phone numbers and a variety of information on campus resources. AOCs are required to attend an initial training session and annual update sessions where changes and new information can be shared by the training facilitators and AOCs themselves. This AOC program benefits the University by having 20 key administrators available to help emergency response personnel manage an incident and deal with the media. In addition, the program provides executive level training and experience to assist these key administrators in broadening their campus perspective and increasing their organizational value.

Introduction of the Organization

East Carolina University (ECU) is a public, Doctoral/Research-Intensive level institution located adjacent to downtown Greenville, the hub of eastern North Carolina's coastal plain. The University has progressed rapidly, but systematically since its inception as a two-year normal school in 1907. Today, ECU's enrollment of more than 20,000 students, and rising, makes it the third largest university in North Carolina.

The University's main, medical and research campuses include 175 buildings encompassing over four million square feet of space and representing approximately \$670 million in physical assets. The main campus consists of more than 400 acres, while the west research campus covers over 450 acres. The health sciences campus is located on 70 acres and houses the Brody School of Medicine and a number of research and clinical facilities.

The University is responsible for the safety and security of nearly 20,000 students, 7,000 employees and countless visitors. It operates 15 residence halls, which house over 5,000 students on campus. ECU hosts many sporting and community events in its 8,000 seat arena, 45,000 seat stadium and numerous auditoriums and meeting rooms. With this many campus inhabitants, the level of clinical and research activity and the areas proclivity for severe weather, emergency management is a vital component of campus administration.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

East Carolina University has maintained an emergency on-call system for a number of years. This system was primarily utilized as a basic response system for emergencies such as utility failures, fires, chemical spills and student-related incidents. Once notified of an emergency, the ECU Police would refer to their standard operating procedure, which lists the departments to contact for that specific emergency. Each department maintains its own on-call list for use by the Police. The response is generally initiated at the lowest level of the organization chart and notification proceeds up the chain of command as the complexity of the event increases. In addition, the ECU Police would contact certain Associate Vice Chancellors and Vice Chancellors, in accordance with their standard operating procedure for that specific type of emergency. As the chief administrative officer, the Executive Vice Chancellor was notified during many of these emergency events. With an already heavy workload and frequent after-hours meetings and events to attend, the added responsibility of constant emergency on-call duty made it difficult for the Executive Vice Chancellor to find any down time or even get away for vacation. Furthermore, the numerous notifications required for each emergency event were

distracting police force resources away from the task of managing an effective response to the emergency. Finally, there appeared to be redundancy within the two on-call systems established for senior administrators.

Design

As mentioned previously, the AOC program was developed to ensure that a duly authorized and trained officer of the University is always available after regular business hours (i.e. nights, weekends and holidays) to help coordinate the University's response during an emergency. The Executive Vice Chancellor, who acts in this capacity during normal business hours, rotates responsibility among a select group of trained and qualified senior university officials. This program was later expanded to include the emergency areas covered by the Vice Chancellor for Student Life as well.

The program utilizes a duty schedule, which is maintained by the program coordinator and submitted to the Student Life on-call coordinator and the ECU Police for use by their telecommunicator. Also included with the schedule is a list of the AOCs, their home address, home phone number, pager number and cellular phone number. AOCs are scheduled to be on duty after normal business hours (nights, weekends and holidays) for a week at a time.

The AOC carries a cellular phone and briefcase at all times while on duty and remains within 20 minutes of campus in case reporting to campus is necessary. Although the vast majority of AOC responses can be handled over the phone, some require the AOC to be on campus, thus the need for remaining close to campus while on duty. The briefcase contains cellular phone accessories

(i.e. extra battery, charger, etc.) and the AOC binder, which includes the ECU Emergency Operations Plan and a multitude of pertinent emergency resource information.

While on duty, the AOC may be notified of a student-related incident by the Student Life on-call staff or ECU Police. The Student Life contact is generally for notification purposes only since Student Life maintains a comprehensive program that handles these issues through internal procedures. Generally, the AOC is notified of an emergency by the ECU Police Telecommunicator.

Upon notification, the AOC will review the incident and subsequent response with the caller to ensure that the response is appropriate and the necessary officials have been notified. The AOC then notifies the necessary Vice Chancellor(s) based on the notification chart in the binder. This chart outlines who to call and when to call them based on the incident type. Some incidents require notification of the Vice Chancellors the next morning and others require notification ASAP. These requirements are based on preferences established by the Vice Chancellors.

Very few incidents require the AOC to physically report to campus. Those incidents that do, generally involve a major incident (e.g. fire) and/or news media on campus. It is important to note that rarely, if ever, will the AOC take over the scene of the incident. The AOC is there to assist the incident commander, already on the scene, with administrator notification, news media relations and overall incident management. All ECU emergencies are managed by utilizing the Incident Command System, commonly used by fire departments and other emergency response agencies. The AOC's assistance allows the incident commander to focus on the response effort.

At the end of an incident, whether handled by phone or on scene, the AOC documents the incident on a report form included in the AOC binder. Where the media is involved, the AOC may provide an on-scene interview or written statement that is channeled through the University's public information officer.

The development of this program primarily utilized existing equipment and personnel. The only real costs involved staff time to develop the program, develop the training and attend the training sessions. The program was developed by staff with responsibility for campus emergency response and the process was viewed as an investment in the continuous improvement of the institution's emergency response system.

The merger of the two separate on-call systems also required no significant resources. In fact, the two coordinators decided to pool their resources and even act as co-coordinators to share the management of the program. The single cellular phone shared by the Student Life on-call group was used by the new AOC Team and made notification easier for the police. The original AOC program used the personal pagers and cellular phones of the individual AOCs. Prior to its use by the new AOC group, the phone was upgraded to a model with vibrating function to make it more acceptable for use in non-business settings such as restaurants, movie theaters and the like. The Student Life resource binder was improved and carried by the AOCs in a briefcase, which also holds the cellular phone and its accessories. The resource binder contains emergency phone numbers, the University emergency operations plan and information regarding campus resources, such as available counseling and other emergency services.

The coordinators developed and presented a more comprehensive training program, which explained the program, the emergency management system, available resources and techniques for dealing with the media. Even the video used for the media relations section of the training was free. This video was not chosen by price, but because it was an excellent video that met the training purposes.

The greatest expense was in staff time to develop and implement the program. Although existing staff were used and these activities could be considered part of their general job duties, the effort did take them away from other projects. However, the time required was not excessive and resulted in a system that would ultimately reduce overall staff time by reducing mistakes and time spent by higher paid executives. When the efficiencies of combining the programs are factored in, the costs become insignificant. In all, combining the programs not only decreased redundancy, but also improved the overall system by taking the best of both programs, combining them together, reviewing the combined result and further enhancing it. With these benefits and minimal costs, it was relatively easy to obtain buy-in from the administration for the program.

Implementation

With the University's experience in dealing with student-related incidents, hurricanes and even a 500-year flood, the Executive Vice Chancellor knew there were a number of senior officials at his disposal with experience in dealing with emergencies. Understanding the need for assistance with his on-call duties, he decided to tap this resource as a means of having an officer of the

University that is always available to assist with managing emergencies after regular business hours.

In March 2000, he tasked the Director of Environmental Health & Safety, the University official responsible for the institution's emergency operations plan, with developing and managing an Administrator-on-Call (AOC) program. The Director of EH&S drafted a program and distributed it for comment to key members of the ECU Emergency Preparedness Team. The program was revised based on the comments and provided to the Executive Vice Chancellor for final approval. By May 2000, the program was finalized and ten senior administrators from the Divisions of Student Life and Administration and Finance were appointed and trained as Administrators-on-Call (AOCs). A duty schedule was then created and the program was implemented for the summer semester of 2000.

As mentioned previously, several months after the implementation of the AOC program, the Division of Student Life decided to implement a similar program to augment the existing Student Life on-call system. After a semester of testing the new Student Life on-call system, the Student Life on-call coordinator contacted the AOC coordinator about joining forces for greater coverage and efficiency. The two coordinators met and after receiving initial approval from their respective Vice Chancellors, began the task of joining the programs together. After two months of work, they presented the new policy and implementation plan to the Vice Chancellors and received approval. The new AOC group, now 20 members strong and twice the size of the original AOC group, was trained in August of 2001 and the program was fully implemented in the fall semester of 2001.

Benefits

The AOC program provides a number of benefits. First, the ECU Police are relieved of some of the notification duties, while receiving much needed assistance in managing public relations, resource procurement and general oversight. Although the police must still contact on-call response personnel (e.g. electricians, ECU HazMat personnel, etc.), their administrative notification now requires only one call to one cellular phone number. Like many universities, ECU has a modest police force whose resources are often strained, especially during a significant event. This system helps them focus on the response, rather than administrator notification and media relations. It also provides administrative assistance from a duly authorized and trained officer of the University. All of this combined, results in a better overall emergency management system. Second, the training and experience provides cross-training and executive development. This is not only a benefit to the University, but also to the AOCs by providing opportunity for advancement. Finally, there is less stress on the Executive Vice Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor for Student Life and they can devote more of their time to their other executive responsibilities.

Additional benefits were realized when the Student Life on-call system was combined with the original AOC program. The merger reduced redundancies in staffing and doubled the number of authorized and trained senior administrators available to manage University emergencies. This ultimately resulted in less duty for each AOC, which was greatly appreciated. It also provided an opportunity to improve the University on-call system by blending together the best practices from the separate systems, reviewing the blended program and implementing additional improvements, which ultimately resulted in a much improved final product. The use of one

cellular phone with one number for police to call and the resource binder are two excellent examples of improvements that came from the Student Life on-call system. Finally, the combined program provided additional cross-training for each AOC in another Division's area. Student Life staff are now more familiar with Administration and Finance emergencies and vice versa. This information sharing makes for closer relationships and a "big picture" perspective for all AOCs.

Retrospect

With two established on-call systems in place, combining the two programs into one resulted in no major problems. Even the implementation of the original AOC program experienced little resistance because of the sound on-call system that already existed and the strong upper level management support. A real key to the success in implementing this program was the bond formed between many of the AOCs during previous emergencies, such as the 500-year flood resulting from Hurricane Floyd in 1999. There was real trust that the system would be designed with their input and implemented through true team effort. The final critical piece was that we decided and professed that we would create a good system, critique it continuously and improve it as needed. Our continuous improvement process quickly resolved any minor issues as they were identified. Now, this is a program that we review annually and update the AOCs during an annual training session.

The only real regret is that we did not combine the AOC and Student Life on-call systems sooner. For any institution that does not yet have an established executive on-call system and is interested in establishing one, it is recommended that the various stakeholders on campus are

consulted to obtain their input and identify the necessary participants up front. Once identified, representatives from the key areas should work together to establish a system that is effective for all groups.