



WASHINGTON
COURTS

Crisis Communications Plan

**A Communications Guide
for use by
Presiding Judges of Local Courts
in the event of a court emergency**

Developed by the
BOARD FOR JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION
Court Security Committee

2008

This booklet is intended to serve as a guideline to assist local courts in developing advance communications strategies for use in the event of a court emergency. It includes information on evaluating the emergency, steps to take when court closure is necessary, and post-emergency assessment. Also included are lists of court personnel and local authorities who should be contacted, and a list of statewide media agencies.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

INITIAL INFORMATION

PLEASE FILL OUT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND SHARE WITH THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM.

Who has been affected? _____

What happened? _____

When did this occur? _____

Where? _____

Why? (If known) _____

How? _____

1. SITUATION LEVEL

Level 1: (On-duty response)

- Office fire
- Minor earthquake
- Partial flooding.
- Minor security incident
- Other

Level 2: (On and off-duty response)

- Natural disaster, i.e. fire, flood or earthquake resulting in a closure
- Major technological failure
- Major security incident such as courthouse bombing

Level 3: (On and off-duty response)

- Disaster or event requiring long-term office closure
- Employees harmed
- Unknown technological consequences

Level 4: (On and off-duty response)

- Large-scale crisis such as a workplace shooting.
- Natural disaster that includes loss of employee life.

2. CRISIS TEAM NOTIFICATION

a. Presiding Judge

Work: _____

Pager: _____

Fax: _____

Home: _____

b. Court Administrator

Work: _____

Pager: _____

Fax: _____

Home: _____

c. County Clerk

Work: _____

Pager: _____

Fax: _____

Home: _____

d. Facility Manager _____

e. City or County Public Information Officer _____

Supreme Court/AOC Contacts During Emergencies

a. State Court Administrator Jeff Hall

Work: 360-357-2120

Fax: 360-357-2127

b. Chief Justice Gerry Alexander

Work: 360-357-2029

Fax: 360-357-2085

c. Court PIO Wendy Ferrell

Work: 360-705-5331

Cell: 206-940-4758

Fax: 360-586-8869

Home: 253-838-2027

3. IF AN EMERGENCY COURT CLOSURE IS REQUIRED:

[General Rule 21](#)(a) provides "a court may be closed if weather, technological failure, or other hazardous or emergency conditions or events are or become such that the safety and welfare of the employees are threatened or the court is unable to operate or demands immediate action to protect the court, its employees or property."

GR 21 also provides that:

Closure of a court may be ordered by the chief justice, the presiding chief judge, presiding judge, or other judge so designated by the affected court who signs an administrative order closing the court and files the original order with the clerk of the affected court.

The judge who directs the closure of the court or his or her designee must notify the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) of the decision to close the court by either:

- a. An e-mail to the AOC at: customerservices1@courts.wa.gov, or
- b. A phone call to AOC Customer Services at 1-800-442-2169, option 1.

The judge must send to the AOC, as soon as practicable, a written statement, outlining the condition or event necessitating the closure, and the anticipated length of the closure. The written statement should be mailed to:

Jeff Hall, State Court Administrator
Temple of Justice
PO Box 41174
Olympia, WA 98504-1174

If an e-mail is sent for initial notification, attaching an unsigned, electronic copy of the order will satisfy the requirement of sending the written statement.

Upon receiving an e-mail or telephone notification of court closure, AOC staff will post an announcement of the closure under the News and Announcements section on the Washington Courts Web site.

4. FIRST PUBLIC STATEMENT

This is what we can confirm at this time:

At approximately _____ this morning/afternoon/evening, the court experienced: _____

At this time our information is limited, however the _____ is continuing to assess the situation. Our primary goal is to ensure (the safety of everyone) (the security of the facility) (restoration of services to the courts) and to provide the most accurate information we can as quickly as possible.

(OPTIONAL) We can confirm that damage has occurred to: _____

We have requested assistance from (state patrol, etc.): _____

We can confirm _____ persons have been injured.
At this time there are _____ known fatalities.

At this time, I would ask that members of the media stay in touch with us to confirm all facts so that the public is assured the most accurate information possible. We will conduct another briefing as soon as possible to provide you with further information. In the meantime, please bear with us.

OPTION: At this time, we would ask that members of the media stay in touch with us to confirm all facts so that the public is assured the most accurate information possible. Future updates will be posted on our web site at _____ as information becomes available.

5. VERIFICATION SHEET

What are the facts?

What is the impact to the public?

How do we plan to resolve the situation?

When and how will we return to normal operations?

6. MEDIA NOTIFICATION

Order of notification:

- First, those on site, via first critical statement.
- Second, those who were not on site for the statement should receive it via fax.

Included on the next pages are lists of contact numbers for major media outlets. Select those that are appropriate for your locale, and list them here for quick reference.

LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS (For localized emergency, i.e. temporary office closure, partial damage to office)			
Name	FAX	Phone	Email

STATEWIDE MAJOR MEDIA OUTLETS (For any emergency assessed at Level 2 or higher)			
Name	FAX	Phone	Email

CAPITOL PRESS CORPS WIRES & BUREAUS:

<p>Associated Press FAX: (360) 956-9405 Phone: (360) 753-7222 dammons@ap.org</p>	<p>News Tribune FAX: (360) 943-7240 Phone: (253) 597-8657 peter.callaghan@thenewstribune.com</p>
<p>Seattle Times FAX: (360) 943-9883 Phone: (360) 943-9878 dpostman@seattletimes.com</p>	<p>Spokesman Review FAX: (360) 664-4978 Phone: 360-664-2598 srwestside@comcast.net</p>
<p>KIRO TV FAX: (360) 753-2712 Phone: (360) 753-1024 newstips@kiroTV.com</p>	<p>Northwest Public Radio FAX: (360) 664-0914 Phone: (360) 352-3971 ajenkins@kplu.org</p>

DAILY NEWSPAPERS :

<p>Everett Herald FAX: (425) 339-3435 Phone: (425) 339-3400 postmaster@heraldnet.com</p>	<p>Seattle Times FAX: (206) 464-2261 Phone: (206) 464-2200 jdeutsch@seattletimes.com</p>
<p>So. County Journal (Kent) FAX (253) 872-6611 Phone: (253) 872-6721</p>	<p>Seattle Post-Intelligencer FAX: (206) 448-8166 Phone: (206) 448-8030 davidmccumber@seattlepi.com</p>
<p>Olympian FAX: (360) 357-0202 Phone: (360) 754-5420 news@theolympian.com</p>	<p>Spokesman Review (Spokane) FAX: (509) 459-5482 Phone: (509) 459-5430 Email: garyg@spokesman.com</p>
<p>The News Tribune (Tacoma) FAX: (253) 597-8274 Phone: (253) 597-8686 hunter.george@thenewstribune.com</p>	<p>The Columbian (Vancouver) FAX: (360) 699-6033 Phone: (360) 694-3391 metrodesk@columbian.com</p>
<p>Yakima Herald-Republic FAX: (509) 577-7767 Phone: (509) 577-7640 news@yakima-herald.com</p>	

BROADCAST TV:

<p>KING-TV (Seattle) <u>FAX:</u> (206) 448-4525 <u>Phone:</u> (206) 448-3850 Email: mginpher@king5.com</p>	<p>KEPR-TV (Tri-cities) FAX: (509) 547-5365 <u>Phone:</u> (509) 547- 0547 Email: newsroom@keprtv.com</p>
<p>KIRO-TV (Seattle) <u>FAX:</u> (206) 441-4840 <u>Phone:</u> (206) 728-8308 Email: newstips@kiroTV.com</p>	<p>KREM-TV (Spokane) FAX: (509) 448-6397 <u>Phone:</u> (509) 838-7350 Email: JJohnson@krem.com</p>
<p>KOMO-TV (Seattle) <u>FAX:</u> (206) 443-4141 <u>Phone:</u> (206) 443-4141 Email: tips@komo4news.com</p>	<p>KNDO-TV (Yakima) FAX: (509) 225-2330 <u>Phone:</u> (509) 225-2323 Email: news@kndo.com</p>
<p>KCPQ-TV (Seattle) FAX (206) 674-1713 <u>Phone:</u> (206) 674-1305 Email: tips@Q13.com</p>	<p>NW Cable News FAX: (206) 448-3797 <u>Phone:</u> 1-888-847-6926 Email: nwnews@nwcN.com</p>
<p>KNDU-TV (Tri-cities) FAX: (509) 737-6767 <u>Phone:</u> (509) 737-6700 Email: news@kndu.com</p>	

RADIO:

<p>KRKO AM (Everett) FAX: (425) 304-1382 Phone: (425) 304-1381 rkonews@northsound1380.com</p>	<p>KOMO AM (Seattle) FAX: (206) 404-3646 Phone: (206) 404-4000 Email: bcalvert@fisherradio.com</p>
<p>KIRO AM (Seattle) FAX: (206) 726-5446 Phone: (206) 726-5476 Email: newsdesk@710kiro.com</p>	<p>KPLU FM (Tacoma) FAX: (253) 535-8332 Phone: (253) 535-7758 Email: info@KPLU.org</p>
<p>KJR AM/ FM (Seattle) FAX: (206) 494-2000 Phone: (206) 285-2997 Email: (none listed)</p>	<p>KQNT AM (Spokane) FAX: (509) 242-1160 Phone: (509) 242-2400 Email: (none listed)</p>

TIPS FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

(Courtesy of the National Center for Courts and Media)

- ***Establish a crisis communications plan.***
Before a crisis strikes, develop workable procedures that include: what to do, what to say, what not to say, who the spokesperson should be, what other agencies to coordinate with, a designated communications team leader, and who needs to be kept informed.
- ***Establish a central communications point.***
Have on hand everything needed for immediate response: important contact names and telephone numbers from whom to obtain data and critical information, media lists with telephone and fax numbers, and additional staff to handle phone calls. If an off-site communications center is needed, arrange for cell phones and laptop computers.
- ***Gather factual information.***
Don't speculate or offer opinions. This only fuels rumors and perpetuates bad information.
- ***Create a fact sheet.***
List the names and titles of key people, such as the court's presiding judge and the administrative or executive officer, and as much factual information as possible, such as in the case of earthquakes, fire, floods or riots, the court locations that have been closed, and those still open. Update the fact sheet as new information becomes available. The spokesperson(s) should be media-trained, speak with the media only on the record and coordinate all interviews through the communications team leader.
- ***Prepare official news releases.***
The spokesperson(s) should be available, prepared, and ready to respond to breaking developments because if "officials" are not on hand, the media will interview anyone they can grab.
- ***Know who the players are.***
Depending on the type of crisis, local, state, federal agencies, as well as bar and/or business leaders might play an important role in your communication loop. Get contact names and phone numbers for every appropriate person and/or agency.

Tips for Crisis Communications – continued

- ***Coordinate, Coordinate, Coordinate.***
Keep a steady flow of information going among all involved, including the crisis team, spokesperson(s), staff, law enforcement, and other local officials. Your crisis communications plan might include daily briefings with representatives from all affected agencies and entities.
- ***Don't stonewall, say "no comment," or lie.***
If an official response has not yet been developed, say so and say when it will be available, then follow through. In responding to a question about something that can't be discussed, say so, instead of "no comment." No comment implies secrecy or that you have something to hide. By saying you can't discuss something and explaining why it can't be discussed (it involves personnel issues which are confidential, it involves a pending case which according to judicial canons can't be discussed, etc.), you've given the media something, even though it's not exactly what they want. That increases your court's credibility.
- ***Be sensitive to media and public needs for timely information.***
Be aware of news deadlines and update the media as often as possible, even if it's to let them know you don't have any new information.
- ***Hold a post-crisis debriefing.***
Review the crisis communication plan. What worked? What didn't work? What could be improved? What could or should have been done differently. Thank everyone involved: staff, volunteers, media, and other agencies for their support and assistance.