

**PRESIDING JUDGE**  
**SAMPLE 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](mailto: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 that outlines 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.

Attached below are contact numbers for major media outlets, to be tailored based on the severity of the disaster:

LOCAL MEDIA (Localized emergency, such as temporary office closure, partial damage to office)

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MEDIA FAX NUMBER/PHONE NUMBER: (Please fill in with your local media contact information) \_\_\_\_\_

STATEWIDE MAJOR MEDIA (Level 2 or higher)

MEDIA FAX NUMBER/PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

**CAPITAL PRESS CORPS WIRES & BUREAUS:**

Associated Press (360) 956-9405 (360) 753-7222  
Seattle Times (360) 943-9883 (360) 943-9878  
News Tribune (360) 943-7240 (253) 597-8657  
Northwest Public Radio (360) 664-0914 (360) 352-3971  
KIRO TV (360) 753-2712 (360) 753-1024

MEDIA FAX NUMBER/PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

**DAILY NEWSPAPERS :**

Everett Herald (425) 339-3435 (425) 339-3400  
South County Journal (Kent) (253) 872-6611 (253) 872-6721  
Olympian (360) 357-0202 (360) 754-5420  
Seattle Times (206) 464-2261 (206) 464-2200  
Seattle Post-Intelligencer (206) 448-8166 (206) 448-8030  
Spokesman Review (509) 459-5482 (509) 459-5400  
News Tribune (Tacoma) (253) 597-8274 (253) 597-8686  
The Columbian (Vancouver) (360) 699-6006 (360) 694-3391  
Yakima Herald Republic (509) 577-7767 (509) 248-1251

**BROADCAST TV**

KING-TV (Seattle) (206) 448-4525 (206) 448-3850  
KIRO-TV (206) 441-4840 (206) 728-8308  
KOMO-TV (206) 443-4141 (206) 443-4141  
KCPQ-TV (206) 674-1713 (206) 674-1305

**RADIO**

KRKO AM (Everett) (425) 304-1382 (425) 304-1380  
KIRO AM (Seattle) (206) 726-5446 (206) 726-5476  
KJR AM/ FM (Seattle) (206) 286-2376 (206) 285-2295  
KOMO AM (Seattle) (206) 516-3110 (206) 516-3101  
KPLU FM (Tacoma) (253) 535-8332 (253) 535-7752

## **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.

*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.