

# Catastrophic Emergency Protocols New Jersey Institute of Technology

## Principles Which Guide Action

A catastrophic emergency is a crisis situation that involves and affects everyone at the University. The emergency may be one of random violence (e.g., hostage situation; sniper), natural disaster (e.g., tornado), or environmental disaster (e.g., gas explosion; building collapse), but it will, by its nature, directly involve large numbers of people and require large scale efforts to manage.

The effects of a catastrophic emergency differ from those of other crises in that the impact is overwhelming, the campus response involves virtually everyone, the media involvement is sudden, intense, and persistent, and administrators are quickly thrust into high profile by the media attention. A temporary suspension of bureaucratic procedures and rules may be necessary as usual activities are superseded by other goals.

Media involvement is immediate and constant. The desire for public information may be felt as intrusive and insensitive, however, the public eager for information includes family members and colleagues of each person in the campus community.

Keeping the entire campus community, the families of students and employees, and the adjacent local community fully informed is of utmost importance. Frequent, accurate information and consistent sources of communication are imperative. Rumor control, prevention of panic, and organization of emergency responses are dependent on these communications.

## IMMEDIATE ACTION

**The Emergency Response Team:** The Emergency Response Team (ERT) while representing campus constituencies should be small enough to make immediate, decisive decisions. Each member of the Team will have specifically designated areas of responsibility. The leader of the ERT will be the President or his designee. The ERT will include representatives from: the Offices of the President, Senior Vice President for Administration and Treasurer, Public Safety, and the Office of Communications. Additional personnel will be added as may be appropriate to the nature of the emergency

Any member of the ERT who learns of a catastrophic emergency will contact Public Safety who will contact the President's Office and others relevant to the situation. All members of the ERT will immediately gather at Information Central at the Public Safety Office.

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### **Information Central:**

Owing to the need to have emergency power (i.e. generator), the Information Central will be the Public Safety Office. All Emergency Meetings will be held at Information Central, and all official decisions, plans, press releases and other communications will be disseminated from the President's Office.

### **The Emergency Response Team will:**

- A. Meet immediately at Information Central.** There will be briefings about the emergency; immediate decisions; and delegation of responsibilities.
- B. Inform and instruct others.** There will be assignments of responsibilities by ERT members.
- C. Keep complete records.** Maintain a daily log of what delegated and done during the emergency response period. This will be use for evaluation, planning, and future reviews.
- D. Meet each subsequent day.** The Team will meet at 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., at a minimum, at Information Central for daily updating and planning until the emergency is resolved.

### **Emergency Procedures:**

- 1. Ensuring Safety:** The NJIT Director of Public Safety will direct plans to secure the immediate safety of the campus community.
- 2. Evacuation procedures:** The Director of Public Safety will direct plans for the evacuation of campus buildings assisted by the Director of Residence Life if campus residences are involved.
- 3. Relocation:** The Director of Residence Life will direct plans for the temporary relocation of resident students and others, as necessary, to alternative locations (e.g. Gym, Hazell Center, local schools / colleges) and for the provision of emergency meals and supplies, and will schedule the constant presence of Residence Life staff at these locations. The Dean of Students will implement immediate, appropriate academic and personal accommodations for students (e.g., emergency loans) to prevent or minimize adverse academic, financial, or personal consequences due to the emergency situation.
- 4. Media Contacts:** All requests for information and interviews will be forwarded to the President's Office. The Director of Communications will coordinate media activities, schedule

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press conferences, provide press releases, provide constant staff coverage at Information Central, and communicate suggestions about contacts with media to all employees and students. The Director of Communications will also provide staff to accompany media to meetings and to locations where they may have contact with students and employees. Media personnel will not be allowed to enter student residence halls.

**5. Phone Banks:** The Director of Communications and the Director of Telecommunications will immediately organize a large and accessible phone information center where: 1) incoming calls will be received, regular, updated information provided, and staff supervised; and 2) outgoing calls to families may be made at no charge by students and others in the campus community. It can be expected that the University will be inundated with phone calls.

**6. Emergency medical and psychological assistance:** The Director of Health Services and Director of the Counseling Center will designate trauma center(s) and direct plans for immediate medical and psychological assistance for victims and community members most affected. If ambulance or emergency services and/or the Red Cross are present on campus, the Director of Health Services and Director of the Counseling Center will coordinate campus services with plans made by the directors of the emergency services units. Offers of volunteer medical or psychological assistance from community professionals or agencies should be referred to the Director of Health Services and the Director of the Counseling Center.

**7. Immediate Pastoral Care:** The Dean of Students will contact appropriate resources to assist in providing appropriate pastoral care for the campus community.

**8. Contacts with Families of Victims:** The Dean of Students will direct plans for contacting family members of student victims of the catastrophic emergency. The Vice President of Human Resources will direct plans for contacting family members of employee victims of the catastrophic emergency.

**9. Emergency Facility Needs:** The Associate Vice President for Facilities Management will direct and coordinate plans for the restoration of campus facilities and utilities including the provision of electrical power, water, heat, ventilation, and telephone service.

### **FOLLOW-UP**

**1. Town Meetings:** To provide accurate information to the campus community meetings of the university community will take place during and/or after the emergency situation in the Campus Center, Gym, or Theater. The meetings will be announced by the ERT to the campus community through email bulletins, NJIT web page, Highlander Pipeline, signs, posters, flyers, and personal contact, as may be practical at the time.

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The ERT will coordinate and facilitate the meeting and will address specifics of the situation, immediate response needs, and the emotional and physical health of the community. He/She will inform the meeting participants of the following guidelines:

- a. Share to the degree that they are comfortable.
- b. Be mindful of the limited time of the meeting and make time for others to participate.
- c. Agree that it is acceptable to disagree.
- d. Agree to respect the right of others to express their opinions, though they may be different from their own.
- e. Agree to explore what other people mean rather than attributing motives to them.
- f. Agree that it is not acceptable to attack to blame others.

Available printed materials listing campus and community resources will be distributed at the meetings. Members of the ERT and other appropriate staff should remain after the meeting(s) to answer questions and offer personal support. A member of the ERT will take minutes of the meeting and will arrange to have the minutes, as well as the resource information, posted on the NJIT web page, Highlander Pipeline, email bulletins, campus newspaper, and flyers after the meeting.

**2. Medical and Psychological Services:** The Director of the Counseling Center and the Director of Health Services will direct plans for on-going medical and psychological follow-up for affected students and will disseminate information about expected responses to trauma and the process of healing. The Director of the Employee Assistance Program will direct plans for on-going follow-up for affected employees

**3. Memorial Services:** If needed, the Dean of Students will provide guidelines for memorial services for students and the Vice President for Human Resources will provide guidelines for memorial services for employee victims in collaboration with victims' family members, friends, and colleagues.

**4. Teachable Moments:** The staff of the Vice President for Academic and Student Services should educate the campus community and others about:

- a) On-going services, programming, and procedures that address emergencies (e.g., violence prevention; safety precautions and inspections).
- b) The values and priorities of the University.
- c) The student organizations that work to address related issues.

Faculty should utilize opportunities to discuss academic issues related to the current emergency (e.g., environmental issues; the judicial system).

**5. Final Communication:** The President will provide a sense of closure by sending an official communication to all members of the campus community, and others deemed necessary,

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following the resolution of the emergency situation. The communication will acknowledge the contributions to the campus emergency response, include appropriate recognition for those whose heroism prevented further tragedy, and look to the future.

**6. Postvention Meeting:** Following resolution of the emergency situation, the President will call a final meeting of the ERT to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the campus response. All team members will provide written details of decisions and activities within their areas of responsibility. The ERT will plan further follow-up services and appropriate acknowledgments at subsequent campus events (e.g., end of that semester; commencement) and important dates (e.g., one year anniversary date). Following the ERT Postvention Meeting, all members of the ERT will review and suggest revisions, for their respective areas of responsibility, regarding emergency responses and coordination with local and state agencies. The Office of the Senior Vice President for Administration and Treasurer will provide written recommendations of changes needed to reduce campus safety risks in the future.

### **RESPONSE TO CATASTROPHIC TRAUMA**

**1. Individual responses to trauma:** Disruption of daily routine, intense emotional distress (e.g., shock; fear; grief), a loss of a sense of basic safety, and need for immediate support and direction. Some individuals may experience the cumulative effects of trauma, reliving earlier experiences (e.g., nightmares) while demonstrating the most intense distress and vulnerability. In all crises individuals are vulnerable and do not think and react in usual ways. As a result, people are more open to new ideas and perceptions; this involves opportunity as well as risk. Members of the ERT in particular should be aware of what ideas and lessons they are teaching by their actions and communications.

**2. Usual responses to catastrophic emergencies:** During and following such an emergency, there is a prolonged search for meaning. Some individuals may experience long lasting emotional effects (e.g., students afraid to sleep without lights on or still having an exaggerated startle response up to one year later). The follow-up needed may need to be much broader and longer lasting, depending on the nature and circumstances of the emergency...

**3. The needs of those providing the emergency response:** ERT members will quickly learn which administrative systems are flexible and effective and which are not and need redirection. Many employees will work very long days for extended periods of time, and may need assistance in expressing and tending to their own, as well as others' needs.

**4. Campus climate:** A campus community dealing with a catastrophic emergency usually experiences a temporary diminution of internal divisions and conflicts while all areas focus on communal needs and goals. During this time, most individuals will be more candid, caring, and

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fair as well as less focused on individual needs and hierarchical power.