An overview of emergency preparedness activities that have happened this summer

From the installation of locks on classroom doors to simulated emergency exercises, this summer has seen a flurry of activity related to emergency preparedness.

The work is part of ongoing efforts to establish a more consistent and coordinated response from all on campus during a crisis, a key recommendation contained in the PAX Group report issued in the spring. The report was commissioned after the Oct. 5 on-campus shooting death of Thomas Meixner, head of the Department of Hydrology and Atmospheric Sciences.

Overseeing many of the efforts is the Office of Public Safety, which is led by Steve Patterson, interim chief safety officer.

"When I arrived at the University of Arizona, one of my first goals was to determine the physical updates that were needed to make campus safer," Patterson said. "At the same time, we need to make sure everyone on campus is educated about what to do in the event of an emergency, whether they are a student, a front-line employee, a faculty member or a leader."

In that vein, University President Robert C. Robbins and other members of the Critical Incident Response Team's executive team participated in a training and a tabletop exercise in June.

Comprising 18 leaders across campus, the executive team provides general assessment of critical incidents and events and makes recommendations to the president regarding response and operations. The team also is involved in recommending actions to manage and resolve incidents, including activation of the Campus Emergency Operations Center, which is staffed by the CIRT working group.

During the June 13 training, members of the executive team studied a mock scenario and reviewed key roles and responsibilities, including activation of the Campus Emergency Operations Center and how members of the executive team receive real-time information during an emergency or crisis.

The EOC is located in the Facilities Management building at 1405 N. Ring Road.

The group also reviewed the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System, and discussed the importance of timely and coordinated dissemination of accurate information to key stakeholders and the public.

The training was organized by Patterson and Lane Spalla, the University's emergency management coordinator.

"The goal of this type of training is to strengthen the University of Arizona Campus Emergency Response Plan through an exercise scenario and facilitated discussion," Patterson said. "This is invaluable training that we plan to do on a regular basis."

In a separate activity, leaders of the units that are part of the newly formed Office of Public Safety – including Facilities Management, the University of Arizona Police Department, the Office of Emergency Management, Risk Management Services and Parking & Transportation Services – met at the Campus Emergency Operations Center for a tabletop exercise and discussion surrounding emergency response.

"Participating in the training and tabletop exercise was an incredibly valuable experience for me," Robbins said. "This kind of training develops a mindset for emergency preparedness, and it creates an ongoing dialogue for how we can best achieve campus safety readiness. With this and many other safety initiatives, we have made a lot of progress over these past few months, but there is still a lot of work to be done and, like many members of our community, I am eager to continue this work."

In late June, representatives from several campus units joined colleagues from Pima Community College and Arizona State University at a three-day course titled "Crisis Management Affecting Institutions of Higher Education: A Collaborative Community Approach." The training covered stakeholder relationships, crisis prevention and protection, recognizing risk, mitigation, recovery and crisis communications.

That was followed by an exercise held early this month for members of the Office of Emergency Management and University of Arizona Health Sciences. Coordinated by the Pima County Office of Emergency Management, the event was an opportunity to ensure the University's Campus Emergency Response Plan aligns with the city and county emergency response plans.

Other preparedness activities that have taken place this summer include:
University leaders meet regularly as part of an Incident Command System to drill down on the recommendations outlined in the PAX Group report[3]. The University previously used an ICS to assess and develop solutions for COVID-19 challenges.

Members of the Campus Safety Commission have been meeting regularly. The group comprises faculty and staff members, students and community members. Its mission is to advise the University’s chief safety officer on matters related to the development, implementation and evaluation of informed, inclusive and responsive safety policies and practices.

The Office of Emergency Management, Risk Management Services and Facilities Management worked with FM building managers to update 165 individual campus building emergency plans, which will be available to the campus community in the coming weeks.

The process followed by the Threat Assessment and Management Team[4] was updated.

Campus safety walk-throughs involving University leaders.

Locks are being installed on classroom doors.

All-hazards posters are being installed in classrooms.

Additional message boards are being installed in classrooms.

Several updates[5] were made to the UAAlert emergency notification system.

A Communications Advisory Group was formed. Members include leaders and communications professionals from several central offices, including the Dean of Students office, Counseling & Psych Services, Human Resources, the University of Arizona Police Department, University Information Technology Services, University of Arizona Health Sciences and Research, Innovation and Impact.

For more information on emergency preparedness and related resources, visit the University Safety website[6]. Additional tips can be found in the article “Staying safe at UArizona Health Sciences[7]” on the Arizona Health Sciences Connect website.

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Links
[2] https://cirt.arizona.edu/about-cirt/working-group
[4] https://tamt.arizona.edu/
[6] https://safety.arizona.edu/