

# ANZUIAG 2003

## Crisis Management at the University of South Australia

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Crisis as defined in the Strategic Crisis Management Team Manual -  
*'The loss of control (caused by internal or external factors) resulting in actual or potential threat to the University's long term ability to do business. A crisis will impact the University's –*

- *Ability to continue operating*
- *Image and reputation*
- *Liabilities (potential and real)'*

### ***Background***

Following several overseas events (September 11<sup>th</sup>, Bali bombing) and the October, 2002 shooting at Monash, senior management at the University of South Australia decided to review the university's preparedness for similar events. Following a workshop featuring several scenarios, it was decided that a project be established to formulate a new approach to crisis management.

### ***Approach***

Project planning determined the following parameters –

- 1 project officer for 4 months
- Supervision by Senior Internal Auditor
- Funding for control room equipment
- Funding for travel (information gathering)

The phases of the project included –

- Information gathering (research)
- Establishment of a baseline (where we were situated)
- Liaison with South Australian Police and Emergency Services
- Development of a framework
- Formation of teams
- Development of a manual
- Simulation exercise
- Revision of framework and manual
- Handover

Enquiries at other Australian universities revealed a variety of approaches, with few having any form of comprehensive approach to crisis management. Monash by far demonstrate 'better practice'. Our research lead us to Emergency Services Australia based at Macedon in Victoria. Although this organisation is primarily aimed at large-scale civil incidents (floods, earthquakes, etc.) affecting large numbers of the population, it has a very valuable resource library. Several useful crisis management texts and videos were borrowed.

### *The Framework*

The University of South Australia has moved toward a two-tiered model. This allows for a division between incident management and crisis management. Nothing is ever as clean cut as this, and the framework allows for overlap and integration. The two levels are –

- Strategic Crisis Management Team (SCMT)
- Campus Response Teams (CRT)

We have included another team which sits somewhere between these and relies heavily on collaboration (especially with the CRT). This team handles international situations.

The escalation model works on immediate notification to the next highest level. A designated member of the higher team decides if that team needs to be called out. Issues are dealt with at the lowest possible level.

### *The Simulation*

On 17<sup>th</sup> July, a simulation exercise was conducted involving a CRT, the SCMT, SAPOL and the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service. The exercise featured –

- A hostage situation involving staff and an international delegation
- A potential bomb

The exercise was controlled by a team and run primarily in the CRT control room and the SCMT control room. Incident response personnel (security and services staff) were expected to move around campus in response to incidents, but not actually carry out evacuations, etc. Similarly, the SCMT was expected to make calls, gather information, and provide media releases. A group of post-graduate journalism students added 'reality' by representing the media and filming a press release.

The exercise lasted 3 hours in real time. A half hour lunch and 'hot' debrief were held at the conclusion of the exercise, followed by a technical workshop dealing with longer term issues. A full debrief lasting 2 hours will be held on August 7<sup>th</sup>.

### *What Worked and Didn't Work*

The simulation lacked some reality because of the 'controlled' nature. This did not necessarily detract from the practice, but stresses and emotions were not 'real'.

There was generally sound acknowledgement of the involvement of SAPOL and Emergency Services in the planing and running of the event. SAPOL have committed to future involvement and are happy to add more realism to the next exercise.

Main issues for concern and rectification were –

- Methods of mass communications to staff and students
- Emergency contact details for staff and students
- Information flows to external entities (control)
- Some dissatisfaction with facilities in the control room(s)
- Recording/logging of information

### *Summation*

Although this was a first-time exercise at the crisis management level, university personnel in all teams performed admirably. The exercise script was deliberately kept simple with minimal 'wildcard' entries. All participants have grasped the notion that there are many things to consider and much work to be done before we can say we are adequately prepared.

For the future, the framework will be finalised, the manual published and responsibility assigned to the various teams for ongoing maintenance, training and testing. It has been suggested that exercises be conducted every 12-18 months. These may practise various levels of crisis management including incident management, interaction with external agencies and crisis management.