

Shelter In Place Exercise March 2023 Highlights

Upon completion of the Emergency Preparedness exercise, we have evaluated the campus resources and response to determine where we are prepared for an emergency situation such as this requiring a call to Shelter in Place and where we need to improve. Today, we are sharing some of our observations and the steps we are taking as an Emergency Response Team to improve with your assistance.

- As announced, we were joined in the exercise by local emergency personnel, including the Westfield Fire Department and Westfield Emergency Management Agency. We are pleased to note that we have a strong community partnership with these groups and feel confident in our ability to coordinate efforts in a real emergency situation.
- The Emergency Response Team also appreciated the campus community's efforts to participate in the exercise as we witnessed most people on campus following guidelines for appropriate Shelter in Place actions. We will continue to work with campus leaders to increase awareness of and participation in emergency preparedness activities to grow participation more in future exercises.
- For those who actively participated, we did note there was some confusion between a Shelter in Place situation and a Lockdown situation and so we will be providing more opportunities for education in the future. Please look for the future distribution of electronic materials and additional campus signage. We would also like to provide in-person emergency training to any group, department, or campus organization interested in hosting members of the Emergency Response Team. This training could easily be built into your back-to-school meetings if you are starting to look ahead to Fall 2023.
- We found that our alarms and alert systems were not consistent across campus in terms of duration of alerts, volume, and reach. Further testing and adjustments will be scheduled in the future when this work will not disrupt classes to ensure critical accuracy and consistency.
- Additional promotion is needed to increase participation in our RAVE message alert system with a special focus on those commuting to campus, community neighbors, and external stakeholders such as families and champions.
- Special consideration needs to be given during future exercises for those who may experience a heightened level of stress during emergency exercises or those who may be significantly impacted by alerts, loud noises, strobe lighting, and other notification techniques. While improvements to our alert systems will aid in this effort, we will do more to engage campus resources such as our Counseling Center, the Banacos Center, and others to best prepare campus community members in advance and support people during any exercises.
- As the exercise focused on a potential threat to our environmental conditions, it included shutting down HVAC systems in some buildings. Our facilities performed as expected, but the exercise alerted us to the need for additional communications around special circumstances in some buildings such as the use of fume hoods. With greater participation in exercise preparations from all areas of campus leadership, we should be able to reduce concerns about the impacts of exercises on everyone. We do, however, want to assure everyone that precautions were taken to ensure the HVAC shutdowns would not cause any safety issues.