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LESSON LEARNED

Campus Emergency Response: Employing a Media Liaison to Manage Media Requests

SUMMARY

Higher education institutions should ensure that a media liaison is available during major incidents on campus. This person should be responsible for managing media requests and for helping to shield victim survivors and their families from the media.

DESCRIPTION

On April 16, 2007, a Virginia Tech student, Seung Hui Cho, killed 32 students and faculty members, wounded 17 more, and then killed himself in 2 separate incidents on Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus. University officials established a family assistance center (FAC) at The Inn at Virginia Tech to serve as the main location for providing support to the families of victims. According to the Virginia Tech Review Panel's report, the FAC was also supposed to shield the victims and surviving family members from intrusive media requests.

After the shootings, the media arrived at the campus and gathered in a parking lot directly across from the FAC. This forced families to walk through the media's cameras and microphones to reach The Inn. The media also gathered at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to cover the activities of families as they arrived to identify the deceased. The overwhelming media presence at both locations intruded upon the families and victim survivors. The Review Panel concluded that the University should ensure that a media expert is available following a large-scale emergency. It also recommended that the University should situate the media at a site farther away so that families and victim survivors are shielded from the media.

Higher education institutions should ensure that a media liaison is available during major incidents on campus. This person should be responsible for managing media requests and for helping to shield victim survivors and their families from the media.

CITATION

Virginia Tech Review Panel. *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech, April 16, 2007*. Aug 2007. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=26591>

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