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University of Dayton, Ohio (url: http://www.udayton.edu/index.php)

'A Good Exercise'

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Though the power outage from a severe windstorm Sept. 14 was "not as much a catastrophe as a major inconvenience, it was a very good exercise of our emergency notification system," said UD's campus communications and physical security administrator.

"The system measured up," Randy Groesbeck said of UD's emergency notification system, which was launched in January. "The critical piece was getting accurate information out, that students and parents knew what was going on, and that we were taking appropriate measures."

The system enables the University to broadcast critical messages through multiple media to the almost 20,000 students, faculty, staff and contractors in the database or to select groups within it, depending on the emergency.

From the evening of the storm to the end of the week, Groesbeck used the system nine times.

"Every day, when we posted new information to the emergency (url: http://emergency.udayton.edu/) updates Web site, we sent a message to parents and students to let them know new information was available," he said. Though he sent the messages to e-mail addresses and cellular phones, the most effective medium for contacting students was SMS text messaging, Groesbeck said.

The campus has responded well to the system, and usage of it is in line with expectations, he said.

Before an incident ever occurs, an organization typically has about 10 to 11 percent of its contacts confirm receipt of a test message, Groesbeck said. In the first trials, UD's rate of reply was consistent with that. Once a system is used for an actual emergency, message confirmation and record updating typically increase significantly. Such was the case at UD as well.

After the storm, Groesbeck said, one-third of recipients on campus confirmed receipt of a broadcast message; among the more than 2,500 parents enrolled, 74 percent confirmed receipt. Those numbers show two major things, he said.

First: the system is working the way it's intended.

"A third of students confirming receipt of the message doesn't mean only a third are getting it; it means a third are listening to the entire message and then following the prompt to confirm that the message was received." If one-third of the recipients are doing that, he's confident the message is getting through.

Second: Parents want and appreciate the information about their students.

"I think parents are more concerned than the students are because they're distant from campus," Groesbeck said, adding that the only way for parents to receive information is for their students to update their emergency contact information at http://address.udayton.edu.

To update your emergency contact information:

- Open Internet browser to http://address.udayton.edu. (url: https://address.udayton.edu/)
- Log into the database with LDAP name and user password.
- Click on the "emergency contact information" tab in the left column under "personal information."
- Fill out the appropriate fields.
- Click on "save changes."