

September 15, 2023 Critical Incident Report
Executive Summary and Recommended Findings

Background:

Around 11:15am, an individual (the subject) found an object made of a solid piece of rubber, and referred to as an inert training aid by ROTC officials, in the Cadet Area of the ROTC program office. The aid is formed in the shape of a rifle, but it is inoperable and has an orange tip. ROTC Cadets use this training aid in drills. The subject took the object into The Hangar cafeteria, where individuals were eating. In post-incident interviews by law enforcement, witnesses reported that subject had not made any threats or pointed the object at anyone. At the same time, witnesses reported that the subject was acting “strange,” such as holding the inert training aid above his head (in a non-threatening way per witnesses). The subject’s “strange” actions reportedly caused some in the cafeteria to run and hide, while others reported the incident to the University police. Within one minute of being notified, the WSU police were on-scene. The officers that entered the cafeteria immediately identified the object as a non-operable inert rubber rifle, quickly taking custody of both the item and the subject without incident. There were no physical injuries. Given the very quick turn of events and timely identification by the officers that the event was not an emergency and individuals were not at physical risk of injury, the Emergency Notification System was not activated at the time of the occurrence. At 11:44am, the police issued an all campus emailed entitled “Police respond to report of gun on campus, no threat to campus.” By 12:05pm, Police Chief Holden met with local media to talk about the incident and promote safety and awareness on campus.

Internal Review:

The incident was deescalated without physical harm or incident, and in a timely manner. However, University leaders requested a review of the incident and response to identify opportunities to improve response to, communication of, and prevention of these type situations. This review was facilitated by the Division of Audit, Risk and Compliance, and representatives from key functions involved in the incident, including Public Safety, Student Affairs, Operations, Enrollment, Communications, and Facilities, also participated. The following summarizes opportunities identified:

1. Campus Safety - Community
 - a. Faculty, staff, student knowledge on how to respond during these types of situations can always be improved. WSU police offer relevant training multiple times annually and without charge, but the University does not require most members of the Campus Community to participate. The University should require mandatory training for faculty and staff (and students, if possible) which will improve our collective response in emergency situations.
2. Communication
 - a. The existing Emergency Notification System remains in place. Additionally, the Division of Public Safety is evaluating a “step-down” level of communication designed to provide the campus community information in a non-emergency situation. This supports a communication protocol to address incidents that do not rise to the level of a serious or continuing threat to the campus but are still a safety concern.

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- b. Increase visuals on the WSU police webpages allowing users to more easily understand any information concerning active, developing, or recent incidents and events. For example, using a graphic or red/green indicators during active incidents.
 - c. All faculty, staff and student “wright.edu” email addresses are entered into the Wright State Alert notification system while fewer than 40% of those individuals have added their mobile number to receive notifications. Individuals should be encouraged to register to receive communications via text and phone in addition to the basic email notification.
3. Front Line Training:
 - a. The University should require faculty and staff to complete training in mental health awareness to improve their ability to be front line support in understanding and identifying student mental health needs. Faculty, because of their frequent/regular interaction with students, have an especially unique vantage point to identify potential student mental health needs promptly, and provide information and referrals to help guide the students to appropriate resources.
4. Campus Safety - Resources
 - a. The Department of Public Safety should consider publishing a chart that illustrates certain actions that officers or the Department may take in response to incidents. Giving that information to the public, the media, and the University Community may promote better understanding of what the University will do in emergency or other situations, and what communications users might expect from the administration. For example, the chart may show which mass communications the University will make during certain types of situations requiring police intervention.
5. Student/Employee health & wellbeing
 - a. Individuals who are concerned that someone may be a threat to themselves or others sometimes report their concerns to the University Police or campus mental/emotional health staff. Those individuals may have an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of what first responders can do while following-up on a report. For example, they may believe that the University will take the subject into custody or involuntarily admit the individual for mental health assessment. While those responses may be available in certain situations, it is often the case that a single report, by itself, is not a sufficient prompt for those types of responses. This can lead to a misalignment between what the University does (and can do), and what the reporter expects. The first responders should offer information and perhaps training about how they respond to these types of reports, and about legal authorities that may require or prohibit particular responses (e.g. a 72-hour mental health hold).

FAQs

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Couldn't the Emergency Notification System have been activated so the campus was aware of the situation? The Emergency Notification System is designed to notify individuals when an emergency occurs, such as with immediate threat to life. It should be noted that the incident was not an active shooter incident. Inappropriate usage reduces the effectiveness of the Emergency Notification System and/or may create panic unnecessarily. In the current incident and based upon the facts, WSU police issued a timely email to the campus community regarding the incident, including stressing the immediate identification that there was no risk to anyone's life. Going forward the University is developing communication templates for notifying campus in these type situations.

How could the ROTC program have allowed a rifle to be sitting out unattended? There was no rifle involved; this incident involved a rubber training aid with an orange tip. Moreover, the subject never made any threats, and did not engage in any threatening behavior. The University does not run the campus ROTC Program and the Office of Audit, Risk, and Compliance did not investigate how the subject acquired the training aid. However, the ROTC cadre reports that it has updated its many safety protocols in response to the incident. For example, they are adding blue on the rubber training aids to make it easier for observers to identify them as inert, and these types of training aids are no longer permitted in the ROTC Cadet Area between training activities.

Can I report a concern and request a welfare check by the WSU Police or Counseling and Wellness Office if I feel concerned about how someone is acting? Absolutely. If members of the Campus Community—or even members of the public—have reason to fear that a student, employee, or campus visitor may be a threat to themselves or others, a report to the University police (or the counseling office) is always appropriate. First responders take these reports seriously, and often respond by performing a “courtesy check” or “welfare check” if they can locate the subject. It is important to understand that your report, by itself, may not be sufficient for law enforcement to effect an arrest or detain the subject under an involuntary mental health hold. However, arrests and mental health holds are tools that can be used in appropriate cases, depending on what behavior or information officers can verify in response to a report.