



## Guidance on Communication Systems for Summoning Emergency Response

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

More organizations, including the University, have shifted partially or fully towards internet-based phone systems (vs. traditional landlines). The purpose of this document is to assist departments in developing their emergency response procedures, taking into account the commonly available communication systems available at the University to summon for emergency assistance.

#### Scope

This guidance applies to all premises owned, leased, occupied or operated by the University of Toronto at all campuses and other locations.

### 2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

#### Unit Head:

- Ensure emergency procedures are developed/implemented for departments/groups/teams under their purview. For guidance, please also refer to: <https://ehs.utoronto.ca/report-an-incident/emergency-procedures/>.
- Where applicable, ensure risk assessments are conducted for unique work locations and activities (see section entitled “Risk Assessment”).
- Be familiar with the [Working Alone Guidelines](#) and implement procedure(s) accordingly.

#### Supervisors & Principal Investigators (PIs):

- Develop emergency response procedures applicable to their team (e.g., Faculty/staff/students/visiting researchers, etc.) and include instructions, where applicable, for different work areas.
- Communicate instructions/provide training on emergency procedures to their team accordingly (e.g., team meetings with minutes, signage, written procedures, memos, onboarding, department-specific training, etc.).
- Ensure that emergency equipment used for emergency response is readily accessible (e.g. not in a locked room) and where applicable, charged and ready for use in an emergency.
- Where applicable and appropriate, conduct a risk assessment (see section entitled “Risk Assessment”) and develop procedures in consultation with the Unit Head, EHS, local facilities teams ([UTSG](#), [UTSC](#), [UTM](#)), local Campus Safety groups ([UTSG](#), [UTSC](#), [UTM](#), [Community Safety Office](#), etc.).
- Where applicable, update procedures and re-communicate to the team members on a periodic basis, at least annually or more frequently based on best practice.
- Where applicable, for remote off-campus or non-UofT locations, the supervisor/PI should also develop plans for accessing emergency services and document in the [Off-Campus Safety Planning Record](#).
- Be familiar with the [Working Alone Guidelines](#) and implement procedure(s) accordingly.

#### Workers, Students & Volunteers:

- Report all hazards to their supervisor/academic contact and contact their supervisor/academic contact if they have any questions about their work area(s).
- Follow emergency procedures/training and use equipment per the procedure/training.
- Participate in the development of the risk assessment/emergency procedure if requested.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact EHS ([ehs.office@utoronto.ca](mailto:ehs.office@utoronto.ca)).

### 3.0 Considerations for Internet-based Phones/Communication Systems

#### *Multiple methods to summon emergency assistance*

As part of emergency planning, emergency procedures should include back-up plans in the event that internet communication or power interruption. Refer to Table 1 for a summary of commonly available communication systems. For more information on Emergency Calling, please also refer to: <https://telecommunications.utoronto.ca/voipatuoft/5-emergency-calling-911/>. For most situations at the University, access to mobile cellular phones as a secondary method to summon emergency assistance is sufficient.

In some unique environments, there may be additional risks due to the operations/activities, specific geographic area and/or location in a building. In these situations, departments are encouraged to conduct a risk assessment to identify secondary method(s) of communication that are best suited to their location and operations. Where departments have implemented additional summoning devices (e.g., panic buttons, Code Blue Phones), departments should periodically review these devices with their local Campus Safety group to ensure they remain functional. Once departments have determined which communication systems will be used, they must also communicate what types of communication systems are available and where they are located, in the event of an emergency.

Occupants are encouraged to stay up-to-date on building notifications and alerts by visiting their local facilities webpage ([UTSG](#), [UTSC](#), [UTM](#)) or where available, subscribe to building alerts ([UTSG F&S Alerts](#)).

#### *Risk Assessment*

Departments are recommended to conduct a risk assessment if there are unique situations that may affect their team's ability to summon emergency assistance or result in an increased need for contacting emergency services. Here are factors that should be consider when conducting a risk assessment (these are examples and not an exhaustive list):

- Past history of incidents requiring 911/Campus Safety calls
- Cellular and internet coverage in their spaces (see section "Testing internet and cellular service)
- Geographic considerations such as remoteness of the location
- Types of activities that occur outside of regular business hours
- Specific hazards associated with their operations (e.g., see section "Lab and Research Settings")
- Population (e.g., vulnerable groups who may not have cellphones)

If you require assistance, please contact [ehs.office@utoronto.ca](mailto:ehs.office@utoronto.ca).

#### *Testing internet and cellular service*

As part of the risk assessment, departments should identify areas of low connectivity (internet, cellular service) and validate connectivity (i.e., try to connect and call a friend, etc.). This may be performed in addition to any campus-wide testing by Information Technology (IT) or Telecommunications groups. Discuss with workers/students where they may have observed poor internet or cellular service. Where applicable, departments should work with their local facilities management groups ([UTSG](#), [UTSC](#), [UTM](#)) and local IT/Telecommunications teams to improve connectivity or to designate a wireless access space.

#### *Lab and Research Settings*

Two-way communication systems (including internet-based calling such as Microsoft Teams Call app) are required in laboratories working with biological materials at containment level 2 (CL2) and all laboratories that use concentrated acids or bases, which are given the designation Chem 2 and Chem 3 (High Hazard) labs. A physical desktop VOIP phone is highly encouraged in addition to a laptop with internet-calling app. For high-risk laboratories that carry significant research safety or security considerations, such as CL3 labs, irradiator facilities, or high volumes of hazardous gases, additional requirements may apply (e.g., landline). Please contact EHS for additional guidance.

If using cellphones as a back-up measure, PIs should evaluate the risk of having cellphones in the lab and at a minimum, cellphones should be left in the paperwork area or kept in secondary containment such as a sealable bag (e.g., Ziploc bags) Please also refer to the [U of T Lab Design Standard](#) , section 1.10 for more information. If you have any further questions, please contact [ehs.office@utoronto.ca](mailto:ehs.office@utoronto.ca).

#### *Other Resources*

Planning for emergencies and safety requires a multi-pronged approach. Here are some resources and programs that can be communicated to your teams and utilized accordingly:

- Campus Safety Programs such as Work Alone, Travel Safer, UAlert and the location of [Campus Emergency Phones](#):
  - UTM: <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/campus-police/> (Click on “Menu”).
  - UTSC: <https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/safety/> (Click “Site Menu”, then “Programs”)
  - UTSG: <https://www.campussafety.utoronto.ca/programs/>

**Table 1: Comparison of Emergency Summoning Methods**

No one method of communication is fail-proof. As part of emergency planning, emergency procedures should include back-up plans in the event that internet communication or power are not available. This table summarizes the different technologies that are commonly available and their benefits and limitations. Other options should be discussed with your local IT/Telecommunications team, based on the risk assessment.

Method	How it works/Benefits	Limitations
VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol, including Microsoft Teams)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a call is made to 911* using VOIP, the call will be answered by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party provider who will confirm the location of the caller and transfer the call to the local 911 center.</li> <li>• If the caller is calling Campus Safety on VOIP, it will be a direct call that is answered by applicable Campus Safety call centre.</li> <li>• Widely available.</li> <li>• Users already familiar with the system (either as desktop phone for VoIP or app on their computer).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network may not be available during a power interruption.</li> <li>• Some areas (e.g., utility rooms) may have weak wireless network service.</li> <li>• Where applicable, departments should work with local facilities management groups (<a href="#">UTSG</a>, <a href="#">UTSC</a>, <a href="#">UTM</a>) and local IT/Telecommunications teams to improve connectivity or to designate a wireless access space.</li> <li>• If accessing calling apps by laptop (e.g., Microsoft Teams), supervisor should establish a process to ensure that a laptop is accessible, charged regularly and the appropriate apps have been installed.</li> </ul>
Cellular coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widely available.</li> <li>• Users already familiar with cellphones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service may not be available during power or cellular service interruptions.</li> <li>• Some areas may have weak cellular service coverage. Same as above, work with your local facilities/IT/telecommunications team to improve coverage. WiFi calling can be enabled on many cellphones, including those on a UofT Corporate Plan, to enable calling in areas where cellular signal may be weak, but campus wireless connectivity is available,</li> <li>• Risk assessment should identify if there are vulnerable groups who are less likely to have access to a cellphone.</li> <li>• If using a shared cellphone, supervisor should establish a process to ensure that the phone is accessible and charged on a regular basis.</li> </ul>
UofT Campus Safety App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available to all UofT community members: <a href="#">Campus Safety</a> app</li> <li>• “Mobile Blue Light” feature to identify your location to Campus Safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobile blue light feature uses GPS to locate the caller (e.g., building location) but does not identify the floor or room. Where possible, call Campus Safety directly to provide the exact location.</li> <li>• Service is dependent on either cellular data or campus wireless network connectivity.</li> </ul>
Landline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional copper phone lines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited availability at the University. Vendor no</li> </ul>

Method	How it works/Benefits	Limitations
(including Code Blue phones)	<p>historically installed in homes and workplaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less impacted by power outages and remains functional.</li> </ul>	<p>longer provides landline infrastructure in new buildings and will not be re-installing in existing buildings if the existing landline infrastructure has been removed through a renovation. This option is only available where cabling already exists, and service is available</p>

\*Individuals are asked to contact Campus Safety after contacting 911 as Special Constables will at most time, be the first responders on scene and provide additional assistance. Campus Safety can also escort and provide access to emergency responders as buildings may be locked after business hours.