

## On Call 24/7

Emergency hotline has backup at Indiana university

(337) 482-2222

That's the phone number to remember when it looks like severe weather might force UL Lafayette to cancel classes. Dial it to hear a recorded message about the university's status.

The emergency hotline is a way for the university to make vital information about health and safety issues available to its students, faculty and staff.

"The local media are very helpful when we need to send out a message. They pass it along as soon as they can. But this hotline allows us to update that message immediately and as often as necessary," said Julie Simon-Dronet, director of Public Relations and News Services at UL Lafayette.

The hotline has mostly been used to disseminate weather-related information. About 5,000 calls to the hotline were logged before and after Hurricane Katrina struck southeastern Louisiana on Aug. 29, 2005, according to Steve Mahler, director of UL Lafayette's Office of Information Networks. About 16,000 calls were received about a month later, when Hurricane Rita slammed into southwestern Louisiana.

But severe weather systems unrelated to hurricanes can force university officials to call off classes. "We want to make sure weather conditions are safe for travel to and from UL Lafayette. But we don't want to cancel classes prematurely," Simon-Dronet said.

"Unnecessary closures can cause hardships for students, faculty and staff. And, under some circumstances, the classes must be rescheduled."



program. Based on the vaccine supply, health officials were able to offer the shots to more students over several days. The hotline helped spread the word.

Here's another number to keep handy: (765) 285-2222.

That's a backup hotline to call should the university ever suffer a catastrophe that would put its phone system out of order for more than a brief period. That phone line is on the campus of Ball State University in Muncie, Ind.

Mahler said UL Lafayette and Ball State University recently worked out a reciprocal agreement. "If we were to lose all of our facilities here, people could dial the backup number, rather than the local number, and they would receive information from UL Lafayette. If Ball State has a problem, it has a backup number here."

He chose Ball State University for a reciprocal arrangement because of its similarities – and its differences.

"I looked for a university of similar size and I happen to be from Indiana, so I'm familiar with Ball State University," he said. "But I was also looking for a school that is in a totally different geographic region. It is not on the same power grid. And, it is not on the same phone system."

To make sure students, faculty and staff always have the emergency hotline and backup hotline line phone numbers handy, those numbers will be printed on university identification cards that will be issued for the fall semester. ■

In February, (337) 482-2222 was used to provide information about free meningitis vaccinations offered to UL Lafayette students after the state DHH Office of Public Health initiated a vaccination

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DENISE GALLAGHER