The safety and security of students, faculty, staff and visitors at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is paramount. We continue to enhance our systems to provide an integrated approach to emergency management and communication.

The most recent tool at our disposal is the Pointer Alerts communication system. Pointer Alerts allows us to communicate emergency information with more than 11,000 people in a very short period of time. It includes cellphone text messages, email notifications and campus computer pop-up alerts to all students, faculty and staff members plus residential hall intercoms.

The system is designed to provide information about emergency situations requiring immediate action, such as a tornado warning or a person with a weapon. The more ways we can communicate with people in an emergency, the greater the chance people will get the message and be able to take action to protect themselves.

Adding text messaging is key. Texting is the most effective way to reach college students during an emergency, experts say. The Pew Research Center also says those ages 18 to 24 are the most active users of text messages.

A test of the Pointer Alert system earlier this month showed 100 percent of the email messages were delivered, 100 percent of the campus network computers displayed the message and 9,135 text messages were delivered.

It is an opt-out system, meaning students and staff are enrolled automatically when they provide contact information to the university. Individuals may opt out of receiving emergency notifications. Opt-out systems have much higher participation than those to which people must opt in.

A Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism review of emergency alert systems last spring found only two of UW System’s 13 four-year campuses — Stevens Point and Platteville — had more than 70 percent of students, faculty and staff signed up to receive text alerts.

The overall participation rate was about 32 percent, the center found, and most had opt-in systems. UW-Platteville had nearly total participation through automatic enrollment. UWSP, which had just implemented this method, already had 88 percent participation. Currently, 90 percent of Pointer Alerts users have at least one cellphone number registered.

In addition to Pointer Alerts, our website has an emergency section designed to peel away so more detailed information can be prominently posted if needed.
We also have the following safety and security systems in place:

- An on-campus police department is open seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The department has five sworn management specialist coordinates emergency notification system administration and proactive campus safety operations.

Ideally, no emergency will occur. But if one does, we work closely with Stevens Point and Portage County law enforcement and emergency management staff to be well prepared to communicate and respond to keep students, faculty, staff and the community safe.