

THE USE OF MASS NOTIFICATION SYSTEMS ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Changes to the Jeanne Clery Act, which was enacted into law in 2008, took effect July 1, 2010. One of the key changes address the way schools and educational facilities address emergency response in their schools. According to the revisions in the legislation, schools must now include the procedures used to immediately notify the campus community during an emergency. The description must include the process the institution will use to confirm an emergency situation, what segments of the campus community will receive notification, how to determine the content of the notification and the titles of the persons who are permitted to initiate the system.

With these changes, more and more educational facilities are turning to mass notification systems as a means of simultaneously notifying faculty and staff members, RA's, students, staff, and public safety entities of an emergency situation on campus. Mass Notification systems are wide-ranging fully-integrated mega-systems that encompass common building functions such as [fire alarm](#), [security](#), [access control](#), [video surveillance](#), and emergency communications capabilities. These systems bring inputs from many different sources under a single event management umbrella so as to implement a response in a manner best suited to the conditions. For example, while it may be appropriate to evacuate an area where a fire has been detected, this response could have disastrous consequences during an incident involving an armed intruder on the campus. Despite this, the fire alarm is frequently the first system activated regardless of the event.

Mass notification systems are generally regarded as a cost effective way to deliver emergency communication messages to a broad range of people at the same time. Being network based, these systems typically can simply be plugged in to your network, assigned an IP address and are operational. Safety and security administrators define how messages are delivered, and to whom. Most systems offer the ability to transmit pre-recorded messages over the telephone lines thereby notifying public safety as well as the campus community of the emergency.

Let's imagine for a minute that there is an unauthorized visitor identified in "ABC Resident Hall" at Wonderful State University. With the mass notification system installed on the network, the RA only has to hit the pre-programmed "hot buttons" on the keyboard to initiate the response. When the RA does so, a series of events take place simultaneously, including:

- Text messages are sent out to the cell phones of all students living in ABC Hall announcing the situation and giving emergency instructions.

- A pop-up window opens at the university switchboard, alerting the operator of the incident
- Pagers and cell phones carried by campus security / campus police receive the digital message
- Radio's carried by campus security / campus police receive a pre-programmed emergency alert message (text-to-speech options are usually available as well) announcing the incident at ABC Hall
- Automatic telephone dialers send a pre-programmed message (again, text-to-speech options may be available) to local police, requesting assistance for an unauthorized visitor in ABC Hall.

Mass notification systems are gaining popularity across the nation, and are proving to be a cost effective and much more reliable solution to the early “panic buttons” often found around the campus. Today, mass notification systems are being used in educational facilities, hospitals, shopping malls, government buildings, casinos, and more. And, while these systems present the educational community with advanced communication and emergency notification capabilities previously thought of as impossible, they also allow a means to provide immediate instructions, and save valuable time that could be otherwise lost while flipping through policies manuals looking for the right policy to provide emergency directions.

In the end, mass notification systems present the educational community with not only an easy and affordable option to comply with the Cleary Act, but with the assurance that emergency announcements and action plans are delivered in a safe and expedient manner.

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