

Greater Baytown-Chambers County Local Emergency Planning Committee

Safeguarding both citizens and government employees who assemble in schools, courthouses, and other public buildings is a top priority for the Greater Baytown-Chambers County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). The LEPC jurisdiction includes the Texas cities of Baytown and Mont Belvieu, and Chambers County.

Challenge

The LEPC already had an emergency notification system in place that included outdoor warning sirens and a mass callout system that could reach residents through phone calls and email. Social media channels including Facebook and Twitter were used to communicate emergency situations and instructions.

However, the LEPC realized that a major gap in mass emergency notification existed.

“While we have outdoor warning sirens, they usually are not heard indoors,” said Ryan Holzaepfel, Baytown Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator. “We realized that there was not a uniform system to quickly alert occupants inside of public buildings.”

To address this gap in emergency notification, the LEPC began looking for an emergency notification system for public locations that have a high occupancy of local citizens, such as area schools and the courthouse.

Finding the Solution Next Door

While participating in a shelter-in-place drill with the neighboring city of La Porte, Texas, Holzaepfel saw that officials there had implemented the Alertus Emergency Mass Notification System as their means to notify occupants in city buildings of an emergency.



La Porte has the largest concentration of chemical plants in the world, and Baytown is home to many plants as well, so the potential for a hazardous waste disaster emphasized the need to enhance the area's emergency notification system.

"We chose Alertus because we had the opportunity to see it in action in the neighboring city of La Porte, Texas," added Holzaepfel. "Since they had utilized it to great success, we decided to implement it as well."

Holzaepfel and the LEPC deployed more than 80 Alertus Alert Beacon®s throughout public schools and publicly owned buildings including Baytown City Hall and the Chambers County Courthouse. These wall-mounted, audible-visual devices emit loud tones and flashing lights to capture the attention of building occupants at a distance. They can also display a custom message about the nature of the emergency and how to respond.



The wall-mounted Alert Beacon sounds, flashes, and displays an alert message in the event of an emergency.

"Our goal was to provide an Alert Beacon for every school in the LEPC boundary, as well as publicly owned places of assembly," explained Holzaepfel. "The Alert Beacons allow us to quickly send messages to building occupants of the need to take emergency action, if necessary."

The local community college in Baytown, Lee College, was also included in the Alertus implementation. "We are very satisfied with Alertus and its use on our campus," said Steve Evans, Vice President of Finance and Administration for Lee College. "We are able to instantly notify students and employees of emergencies, etc., through their cell phones, computers, office desktops, and campus alarm systems."

Alert Beacons can be installed almost anywhere and seamlessly integrate with existing notification systems. "We knew the Alert Beacons would integrate with the software that activates our community warning sirens," added Holzaepfel. "Instead of having to log into two different software packages and remember two different passwords, this makes it easier."

Ready if an Emergency Rises

If the Alertus System needs to be activated, all areas under the jurisdiction of the LEPC are ready. In Baytown, emergency dispatchers can activate the Alert Beacons, and all City Hall employees have knowledge of how the system works. Additionally, the Alertus System is tested weekly in conjunction with the community siren warning test.

Emergency dispatchers in Mont Belvieu and Chambers County can both activate their Alert Beacons if they need to notify their respective districts. "It doesn't have to be a chemical incident," added Holzaepfel. "It can be any kind of emergency that could require a lockdown or shelter in place."

Eventual Goal of Single Point Activation

The LEPC was able to purchase and implement the Alertus Emergency Notification System because of the contributions made by local industrial partners. The LEPC membership is comprised of local industry members such as ExxonMobil, ChevronPhillips, and Covestro.

Adding the Alertus System now provides Holzaepfel a more effective system to reach occupants in public buildings with life-saving communications. "By using all or a combination of the outdoor sirens, mass callout systems, and Alert Beacons, we are able to get the appropriate messages to the target audience," he added.

Holzaepfel continues to improve the system and is currently working to integrate all of the notification systems into one activation point to streamline and make it easier to send notifications via their various communication channels.