

City of La Porte, Texas

Location: Harris County, TX

Population: 34,469

City Size: 20 sq. miles

Challenge

The City of La Porte, which has the largest concentration of chemical plants in the world, was looking for a solution to its emergency notification challenges. The city needed a solution that allowed them to easily alert schools and other public buildings in the event of a threat, such as one involving hazardous waste. The city's existing public address systems proved both slow and unreliable, so the notification solution would need to provide quick and easy alerting in the event of an emergency.

Jeff Suggs, emergency management coordinator for the City of La Porte, Texas, discusses the city's unique challenge and solution.

The Problem with PA Notification

Before Alertus® we had another system for emergency notification, which used VHF radio signal to contact our schools and public buildings. The dispatcher would have to speak over a microphone and tell people what the situation was. The problem was, someone had to be in the room to hear it. If the speaker was turned down or the battery happened to be dead, we always had to follow up with a phone call, and that just took too long.

The Alert Beacon® cut down a lot of the front-end time of getting information to people so that they can react. Alertus is a great tool in that it's very speedy in its message delivery.



The Alertus Solution

So, I started looking at other systems, and I ran across Alertus at a conference. I liked the idea of a device that actually flashed instead of relying on someone speaking into a microphone.

All of our school buildings have Alert Beacons installed, as well as our libraries, city hall, recreation centers, senior centers; any public building basically. The intent and the idea for the future is to branch out the Alertus System further into the community.



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

Handling Hazardous Materials

La Porte has the largest concentration of chemical plants in the world. With 48 chemical facilities and two ports, thousands of miles of plants and pipelines, and hundreds of trucks going through every day, there's a definite risk for a hazardous material.

We've partnered with some of our chemical plants, and we now have Alert Beacons in those facilities; that way those locations have that same information. Alertus lets us communicate as fast as possible to the general public, especially our schools, to get them to shelter in place during those incidents. In that respect, we're starting to work Alertus into private entities in the city in addition to the public facilities so we can have a city-wide notification system.

Third-Party Notification System Integration

In the future, will we use more scrolling signs, and integrate more into the system? Absolutely, and Alertus is very much willing to work together with almost any third-party notification company to strengthen your system. We have another notification system called Blackboard Connect, and Alertus integrated with that company so we could activate them simultaneously. Alertus will reach out to whomever; they're willing to work with anyone to increase the number of notification tools in your toolbox.

Additional Notification Coverage

We want to go ahead and continue to build relationships with private companies to increase our coverage area. We also want to make sure that our neighbors get involved. I know that after we got the Alertus system one of our neighboring cities, Pasadena, has now installed 100 Alert Beacons, and another neighbor, Deer Park, is also looking at getting the Alertus system. I think that because we're moving forward with Alertus here and others get a chance to see what Alertus can do, other people are taking notice.

Ultimately, we'd like to see others adopting Alertus on a large scale so that the Alertus system becomes recognizable, something that everyone knows about. Whether someone walks into a school building here, a neighboring city hall, or a fire station in another county, they'll see that Alert Beacon and feel protected.