

WOULD YOU “VALUE ENGINEER” LIFE-SAFETY?



THE IMPORTANCE OF CODE, STANDARD & SYSTEM INTEGRATION FOR MASS NOTIFICATION

When it comes to preparing a risk assessment for your campus or facility, whose responsibility is it to utilize best practices to ensure the life-safety of students, faculty, employees, occupants, and visitors?

We can all agree that safety is paramount, particularly life-safety as in the case of an emergency building evacuation, active shooter scenario or other emergency situation. Consider what would happen if manufacturers arbitrarily built life-safety equipment without consideration of established codes and standards?

For example, what if the product you think is safe, does not meet proper fire, electrical or other established industry standards for safety, or what if it lacks essential elements for performance that ensure system functionality?

In considering mass notification that responds to the emergency communication requirements of your risk assessment, having a product agnostic, “governing” body, like UL, set the bar for safety requirements, allows stakeholders a higher degree of “trust” about the level in which the system has been tested.

Meeting code and standard should be a level of entry for all manufacturers of mass notification solutions and equipment. Having this serve as an acceptable degree of safety, can ensure that consumers ultimately invest in on-premise, wide area speakers and electronic/digital notification solutions that work and perform properly.

As you consider the life safety of your students, faculty, employees and visitors, compliance to established safety standards should never be optional or “value engineered” out of the project.

Choosing products and solutions that meet established codes, such as NFPA 72 (National Fire Protection Association) and the UL 2572 Standard for Mass Notification, is one way to ensure best practices and better outcomes.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE CODES & STANDARDS?

National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code NFPA 72, Chapter 24: Emergency Communications Systems is the code defining how to deliver an effective and robust Mass Notification Emergency Communication (MNEC) system that can be relied on in an emergency. NFPA72 describes the basis for MNEC systems to integrate to the Fire Alarm Control Panels (FACP) and sets the criteria of reach, clarity, redundancy, and reporting for MNEC systems.

UL2572 is the standard set by UL to address Mass Notification Systems (MNS). UL2572 sets forth the requirements and criteria for how the control units of a MNS will be designed and tested to ensure that the system's physical components and associated software applications can be relied on in a mass notification event.

UL864 is the standard set by UL to specifically address Fire Alarm Control Panels. UL864 sets forth the requirements for devices acting as FACP's and those devices integrating into FACP. This listing allows an MNS with UL864 certification to integrate with a FACP to ensure life-safety communication can be delivered in any type of emergency scenario.

An important thing to consider is that mass communication and all-call or emergency paging systems are not designed or engineered to meet these codes and standards.

LIFE SAFETY & BUILDING SYSTEM INTEGRATION

If we consider meeting code and standard as a threshold for providing trusted life-safety solutions, what else is important to consider? For one, the ease by which the system can be integrated, its intelligibility, features and benefits all play an important role in ensuring that the emergency communication system you put in place will work, where you need it, when you need it to, and reach everyone you intend it to.

Other “must have” requirements, that truly separate Mass Notification from overhead emergency paging systems and mass communication systems include providing an end-to-end solution that incorporates all the necessary system supervision, reporting, redundancy, monitoring, and Fire Alarm Control Unit (FACU) integration to ensure the functionality and performance of the system during crisis.

THE CHALLENGE FOR INTEGRATORS

A real challenge for integrators when designing and engineering Mass Notification Systems is the ability to coordinate between various manufacturers, API's, and control platforms. This happens because traditionally there have been three or more manufacturers coordinating to create one system that provides the three-prongs for Mass Notification (distributed audio (including wide area audio), digital notification (text, tweet, SMS, phone, digital signage, etc.) and system controls and integration.

The value in designing and specifying a solution that can seamlessly integrate all parts of the Mass Notification System (while maintaining strict adherence to code and standard) cannot be understated.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – THE MASS NOTIFICATION OPPORTUNITY

For security professionals and integrators, the market need for mass notification and the global forecast for the market is estimated to be worth \$17.3 billion by 2024. This figure, according to a published report by MarketsandMarkets*¹ includes all hardware, software and services for in-building, wide area, and distributed recipient solutions) and is being driven by the growing concern for public safety, security and the increasing need for integrated systems and notification devices.

Currently, there are code committees reviewing wide-spread adoption for the UL standard. When compliance to the standard is realized, there will be a compelling directive for campuses, government buildings and other facilities to have a robust emergency communication system that meets stringent requirements for Mass Notification to communicate during non-fire emergencies and other hazards.

The increase in demand for emergency communication systems continues to grow, but these systems, specifically mass notification systems, do not have to be difficult to specify or to install. In fact, having options for an intuitive, open-platform solution that can incorporate all the distinct parts of the entire system will go a long way to streamlining and refining system architecture and interoperability with end points, other buildings and systems.

Looking forward, these types of intelligent systems can be used to collect data that can prove valuable to facility and security professionals making decisions that impact the life-safety of their occupants and visitors.

Considering this, your mass notification system just may be the most important investment you make to ensure the safety and security of your people, property, and brand.

For more information, visit www.mercurynotifications.com or contact Mercury Notifications at 516.802.0011 or by email at info@mercuryn.com.