

Building Integration Necessary to Deliver True Mass Notification

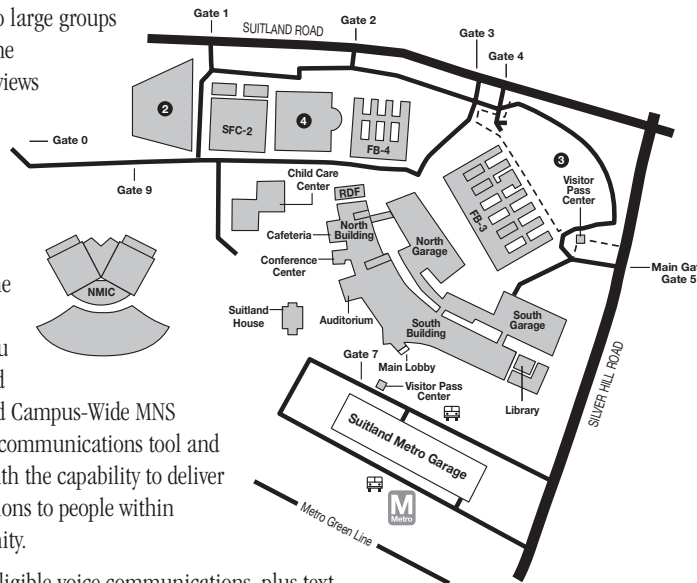
Challenge. As part of constructing a new headquarters building, The U.S. Census Bureau needed to assess the mass notification capabilities of the existing emergency paging systems on its campus, as well as determine the suitability of interfacing these systems and become part of a unified Campus-Wide Mass Notification System (MNS). As the leading source of quality data about the nation’s people and economy, employing nearly 12,000 people, the Bureau faced an immediate obstacle: how to seamlessly integrate existing systems within its new headquarters building.

Solution. Rolf Jensen & Associates (RJA), the premier fire protection and code consultants in the country, got the call to formulate a plan. RJA designed a Campus-Wide MNS to meet the Census Bureau’s growing emergency communications challenges across the Suitland Federal Center Campus. In formulating the recommendations, RJA had to balance ongoing operability with the emergency paging systems in the existing buildings with the need to bring proper coverage to the new headquarters buildings. RJA determined the overall goal to be Situational Awareness – the need to know what is happening NOW on a campus – and to get the word out quickly, neatly and efficiently to large groups of widely distributed individuals. The company conducted in-depth interviews and utilized guidelines and “best practices” described by the DOD Unified Facilities Criteria,

GSA Interagency Security Committee and National Fire Protection Association, as well as the special operational requirements expressed by the U.S. Census Bureau Safety, Information Technology and Security Departments. The proposed Campus-Wide MNS envisioned by RJA would be both a communications tool and an emergency management tool with the capability to deliver real-time information and instructions to people within buildings or in the immediate vicinity.

The MNS would use primarily intelligible voice communications, plus text messages for hearing-impaired employees, with the capability to integrate visible signals, graphics, tactile and other communication methods in the future. It would tap the parking structures to become part of the assembly strategy for the new Headquarters Office Complex and keep the current wireless cellular radio-telephone communication devices to perform post incident roll-call, while still deploying existing emergency paging systems. Additional recommendations included a new software command and control capability at multiple locations in the headquarters building, which would interface to the fire alarm systems.

Result. The purpose of a Campus-Wide MNS is to reduce the risk of mass casualties by providing a timely means to notify building occupants, visitors or service personnel of threats, and then instruct them in how to respond. RJA used their wealth of experience to provide the Census Bureau with a comprehensive tool that includes evacuation plans, shelter-in-place plans, response plans and decision scenarios. Vital MNS elements include wide-area exterior paging systems, expansion of the voice evacuation system, improvements to the radio-controlled paging systems on and off campus and the ability to launch digital voice and text messages. RJA also helped make the 1.5 million square feet of office space and 1 million square feet of parking space more secure, which will enable the Census Bureau to be better prepared to start planning its 2010 census activities.



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