5 Reasons Why You Should Have an Emergency Communication System.

As an architect or engineer, when you design a facility's life safety system, your primary goal is to achieve compliance with state and local fire code requirements. While that approach can help ensure a building is well-equipped to protect lives and property in an emergency, you may be missing out on some worthwhile capabilities. Those capabilities can help you better support all occupants of your building, including aging, disabled, or other populations requiring added levels of assistance.

If you're building a multi-story facility whose occupants may require a level of assistance, you should consider installing an Emergency Communication System (ECS).

NFPA 72 describes ECS as "a system for the protection of life by indicating the existence of an emergency situation and communicating information necessary to facilitate an appropriate response and action." Also referred to as an "Area of Refuge system," an ECS is typically connected to an off-site supervising station for 24/7 monitoring. Supervising station operators can talk with the occupant that needs assistance and forward that information to the proper emergency responders as needed.

Under NFPA 101 and the International Building Code (IBC), an ECS is a requirement for many High-Rise, Assembly, Education, Mercantile, Business, Hotels, and Dormatory buildings. But other facilities can benefit from the greater peace of mind, improved communication, and the better-coordinated emergency response that an ECS can support. It may not be required by code, but here are five reasons why it will benefit you and your occupants.

1   All populations deserve equal treatment

Imagine how you would feel if you found yourself in your facility and a fire broke out. Now imagine how you would feel in that same situation if you were disabled, elderly, or otherwise unable to evacuate swiftly on your own. You would appreciate knowing you had a nearby place to go where you could wait safely to be evacuated. You would also appreciate having the ability to communicate back and forth with emergency personnel the entire time.

An ECS offers those capabilities. You can establish areas of refuge equipped with easy, push-button communications. That can give occupants requiring evacuation the assistance, information, and reassurance they need in an emergency. Ultimately, it means everyone in your facility is treated equally, whether they can evacuate on their own or not.

2 Emergency communication is useful for more than fire

An ECS is not just for fire evacuation. Once an ECS is installed and operating, people can use it for any emergency situation – from assaults and active shooter incidents to power outages and natural disasters. An ECS with power backup will function even during power outages, ensuring that you're better equipped to disseminate information to occupants under almost any circumstance. That's something everyone will appreciate.

3 Buildings are getting smarter and communication is more important

It used to be that elevators were off-limits to evacuees in an emergency. That's no longer true. Today, elevators can be designed, installed, and integrated with the fire alarm system to facilitate evacuations.

For occupants requiring added levels of assistance in emergency situations, these Occupant Evacuation Elevators (OEE) are a tremendous benefit, offering them greater ability to evacuate swiftly and safely when seconds count.

But how do you inform occupants that they can evacuate safely via selected elevators? An ECS system can be used to direct them to the nearest designated elevator via message boards or displays. In addition, the ECS can play specific voice messages in those areas to provide helpful instructions to occupants. Result? You can be sure OEEs are fully utilized in an emergency to save lives.

4 You may be required to have an ECS in the near future

NFPA 101 and the International Building Code (IBC) now require ECS for certain facilities. However, while your local authorities might not mandate it today, if history is any guide, they will likely do so in the near future. You can plan ahead – and better serve all populations in your building – by considering the installation of an ECS now. It will likely be less disruptive and more affordable than to do it later.

5 An ECS today is smarter, more robust and reliable, and easier to manage and maintain

Perhaps you're wary of installing an ECS because it means having yet another building system to learn, manage, and maintain. But an ECS can be tightly integrated with your facility's life safety system, enabling you to control both systems from a central location. In addition, an ECS is a highly sophisticated, supervised system, with redundancy, power backup, and cloud-based communication, which can make management easier. There are even ECS solutions that include sophisticated software and hardware that can identify and pinpoint the location of gunshots, enabling faster response in an active shooter situation. Your buildings get enhanced protection and communication without a major increase in facilities management workload.

Take the next step now

To learn more about the best ways to design and deploy an ECS, visit **www.simplex-fire.com**.

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