

CASE STUDY: Tarrant County, Texas



Emergency Managers in Tarrant County, Texas use Send Word Now to Protect Government Employees

Tarrant County, Texas, is one of the fastest growing urban counties in the United States. Its county seat, Fort Worth, is home to numerous historic buildings that cannot be retrofitted with sirens or warning lights, making it difficult for emergency responders to notify occupants of a crisis. For County employees working indoors in downtown Fort Worth, the outdoor warning system just isn't loud enough to hear clearly. So, in order to reach staff members quickly during emergencies, the Tarrant County Office of Emergency Management relies on Send Word Now's on-demand notification system, which distributes thousands of messages within seconds across a broad range of devices.

Putting Safety First

Melissa Patterson, the Emergency Management Coordinator for Tarrant County, is responsible for both working with municipalities outside of county government and protecting the safety of employees within county government any time that there is a local or state-wide emergency. She looks out for almost 4,500 county employees as well as residents living in un-incorporated areas of Tarrant County. She is also responsible for notifying the emergency managers of 38 cities within the County concerning events outside their jurisdictions.

In any type of crisis, Patterson relies on Send Word Now's rapid notification system to put safety first at county buildings and to other Emergency Operation Centers in cities across the County. "One of our biggest concerns when we were looking for a notification system was helping our downtown employees feel safer," she explains. "They couldn't hear the sirens, and we needed something that would make them feel safe and comfortable. Now, we can reach nearly 4,000 employees across Tarrant County all at once, and we can track who has or hasn't received our messages."

Streamlined Crisis Communication

Tarrant County has used Send Word Now during severe weather emergencies such as tornadoes,

flash floods and wildfires, as well as for amber, silver, and blue alerts, which signal missing children, elderly persons, and wounded or killed police officers, respectively. When a crisis occurs, Tarrant County officials use the system to dispatch special teams, which include an arson task force, medical operations unit, and a group of emergency management coordinators from surrounding cities. They also use the platform to message all employees and let them know what is happening.

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Depending on the situation or time of day, coordinators use different modalities to send alerts. "When we need immediate contact, we will send phone calls," explains Patterson, adding "if the situation is less urgent, we will only send e-mails or text messages." Some employees also ask for family members

to receive messages, and the county allows them to add as many contact points as they'd like to the Send Word Now database.

Once alerts have been sent, the county uses Send Word Now's Get Word Back response feature to receive instant updates from the field. "We can use the system as a roll call," says Patterson. "Using Get Word Back, our special teams can let us know immediately whether or not they can respond to any given disaster." Later on, emergency management officials use Send Word Now's

extensive reporting feature to conduct after-action reviews, in order to see what can be improved in the future.

Send Word Now Put To The Test

In the four years that Tarrant County has relied on Send Word Now for rapid communication, the system has certainly been put to the test. In 2009, for example, county officials used the service during the H1N1 scare to send notices to city government and elected officials to join a conference call and to verify that they would be able to attend.

Throughout April and May of 2011, as the county experienced severe weather patterns, a small team of emergency coordinators used Send Word Now's WeatherBlast feature to receive real-time weather updates. They then used the system's notification tool to send out the most important bits of information to the larger group of employees. Later that summer, as dangerous wildfires spread throughout Texas, they used Send Word Now to dispatch the county's arson task force on the fly.

Tarrant County also depends on Send Word Now to communicate during smaller-scale crises. In August 2011, a large fire broke out at the intersection of two major highways in the northeast part of the county when a tanker truck carrying jet fuel tipped over. As soon as the accident occurred, Patterson used Send Word Now to message all county employees and alert them of the situation. "Using this messaging service," she says, "we were able to keep our employees safe and help prevent them from getting snarled in traffic on their way home."

Why Send Word Now

When selecting an emergency notification platform, Tarrant County emergency managers wanted a lightweight package that offered a comprehensive suite of services. They chose Send Word Now because it simply "had capabilities that its competitors did not," says Patterson. "The customer support has also been great and the customer support team reaches out to us often," she adds.

Aside from seamless conference call capabilities, BlackBerry® PIN messaging, and customizable caller ID, Patterson notes that Send Word Now's Scenarios have been extremely helpful to the



County. "This feature saves us a lot of time," she says. "Some of our employees using the Send Word Now system may not always know all of the details of an emergency. With Scenarios, they can send out pre-written messages to pre-selected groups with just the click of a button. Having an alert that is ready to go saves me a tremendous amount of time, and that is invaluable."

The Send Word Now Advantage

By tailoring its services to the needs of its customers, Send Word Now consistently provides innovative notification solutions that outmatch its competitor's offerings. Through its BlackBerry® and iPhone® integrations, Conference Bridge functionality, and unique features such as multi-lingual alerts, customers can take advantage of Send Word Now's customizable platform to maximize their communication efforts. And on top of its robust software features, Send Word Now offers best-in-class customer support services that just can't be beat.

Send Word Now is the leading provider of on-demand alerting and response services for both routine and emergency communication. The easy-to-use, web-based emergency notification service is used by government agencies, municipalities, universities, non-profit organizations and businesses, including many Fortune 500 companies, to ensure fast, effective, two-way communication in real-time. Send Word Now's Alert Tracer® provides a full audit trail of messages sent and received for after-action reporting and follow-up. Designed to reach anyone, anywhere, anytime, with any device over any type of connection, Send Word Now's mass notification system is capable of transmitting hundreds of thousands of voice and text messages in minutes.