Fire Station Alerting: Improving Turn Out Time

By William Carpenter, Battalion Chief, Frisco, Tx Fire Department

It is pretty evident that the most basic and fundamental act we do as emergency responders is… respond to emergencies. While we cannot control the type of emergency our firefighting and EMS personnel are about to be dispatched to, we can control the method utilized to alert them of an emergency call for service. One advanced solution could be the Phoenix G2 Station Alerting System by US Digital Designs.

Before moving to the fully automated G2 system, the Frisco, Texas Fire Department utilized manual station notification that would require an emergency operator to alert each firehouse of an incoming call for service. During busier times when multiple emergencies were being called into our communications center, our dispatchers would notify each station individually of their call for service and perform those tasks one at a time and one after another. With such an emphasis on response times today, this put the next call for service immediately behind the clock. Our emergency operators are some of the best in the business, but we are always striving to be better and shave as many seconds as possible from our alerting times. The strengths of the G2 system are aimed directly at this issue.

The first and most notable enhancement is the time differential we found between call time received and the notification (or dispatching) of our fire stations. Instead of waiting on a human voice to alert our units in the field, there is now an automated voice notifying our response personnel. No longer are we subject to increases in speed or inflection of voice when trying to decipher a message, providing consistency for response personnel and reducing errors. This allows our dispatchers to continue taking call information and providing direction to the reporting party. The G2 alerting system permits our calls for service to be initiated simultaneously, eliminating unnecessary wait time in notifying stations one after another. Now that our fire stations are alerted through network (IT) channels versus the radio (at least inside the fire station), calls for service are no longer "stacked."

The G2 alerting system provides each station with multiple methods to be notified of call information. TV monitors in the day rooms and kitchens, as well as LED message boards strategically located within our apparatus bays and throughout the stations provide responders with information that is needed well before they climb onto their rig. The G2 system also provides bedroom remotes that allow firefighters of multi-company houses to select the apparatus they are staffing for their shift. This allows them to continue sleeping and not be disturbed when another unit from their station is dispatched to a call for service. We can alert and awake the necessary personnel while allowing others to continue sleeping and remain rested and prepared for their next emergency call for service. Before our G2 system was in place, the entire station was alerted with loud tones and bright white lights. We now have ramping tones (tones that begin soft and slowly escalate in volume) and softer red LED lighting that together lessen the cardiac stress of waking our firefighting personnel. Heart-healthy firefighters are a goal in the fire service; any opportunity to reduce stress on our staff provides value to such systems.
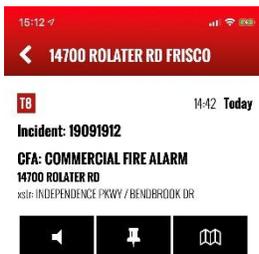
One of the more widely appreciated features of the Phoenix G2 Station Alerting System is the mobile device application for IOS and Android platforms. Our driver/operators (as well as other firefighters and officers) now have incident information pushed to their cell phones providing directions and call location before jumping into their rigs. We frequently find that our smart devices alert us to calls for service a good second or so before our station tones become active. By simply touching a popup banner on their mobile device screen while waiting on their crew members to bunk out, our driver/operators can evaluate and preplan their route of travel allowing their officer more time to strategize on-scene tactics without having to provide constant turn by turn directions. Personnel from other stations can also stay situationally aware of emergencies being mitigated throughout the city. Another benefit is that our citizen volunteers that help with setting up rehab at long-term incidents are able to use the G2 application to alert them of certain call types.
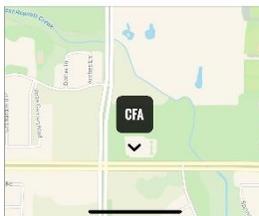
Cities in the fast-growing North Texas area contain dynamic communities that are building up and out without any sign or indication of slowing down. Our personnel are forced to be extremely flexible when it comes to staffing as they are frequently rotated through districts as new stations are being built at

such a fast pace. Fire departments should strongly consider putting technology in place to support their staff in an effort to reduce response times, improve situational awareness, and overcome rapidly changing environments (both new and established departments). The Phoenix G2 Station Alerting System by US Digital Designs is one aspect of technology support we can provide our service members to further enhance emergency response.