



System Upgrade Sets Course for University Fire Protection

At 26,000 square-feet, the newly renovated Prather Coliseum at Louisiana's Northwestern State University (NSU) is not only the largest facility in Natchitoches Parish (county), but one that is now equipped with a single, fully-supervised fire alarm and emergency communications system.

The University is taking advantage of one of Silent Knight's most innovative Farenhyt products, the IFP-1000ECS combination fire alarm and emergency communications panel, in addition to speaker/strobes, smoke detectors, duct detectors and heat detectors from System Sensor installed throughout the multi-purpose facility.

NSU's story began about a year and a half ago when the fire alarm system protecting the arena, home to the Demon's basketball and volleyball teams, was found to have unrepairable issues that arose during the annual inspection, prompting the fire marshal to put the facility – originally built in 1964 – under a fire watch.

"I immediately contacted Fire Tech Systems, who does all our maintenance and servicing on campus, as well as our fire protection consultant, to come up with a solution to temporarily fix the situation," recalls Chuck Bourg, NSU's director of physical plant and facilities. "Since we were also in the process of renovating the facility and increasing its seating capacity, we then decided to upgrade the fire protection/voice evacuation system."

Although Fire Tech was initially brought in for the quick fix, they were part of an open bid for the upgrade, and presented Farenhyt's fire alarm with integrated mass notification capabilities for the job.

"We like the panel's ease of installation and programming, capability to expand, and user-friendliness for the operator," states Ronald J. Case, senior project manager, Fire Tech Systems, Shreveport, La. "The three-year warranty was another big plus."

Major Upgrade

Not only did the new system bring NSU's fire protection up-to-code, but the Coliseum went from only six pull stations and two horns, to more than 175 notification devices, 73 detectors, 16 pull stations, and 85 modules for integration into other building equipment.

"In my opinion, we got in every nook and cranny of that building," reports Case.

While filling out the specification written by fire protection consultant Glen McBride with Associated Design Group, Lafayette, La., Fire Tech chose System Sensor products for the speaker/strobes.

"We have a long-running relationship with System Sensor and have never found anything comparable to the sound quality. In addition, they're economical products and we can pass those savings down to our end-user," notes Case.

For the NSU project, Case also found the power consumption, aesthetics and ease of installation for the notification and detection devices to be a very good fit.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the installation was outfitting the domed ceiling, reaching 52 feet at its peak, with speaker/strobes. Although a special lift was required, along with some extra finesse to run the cables and wires to this hard-to-reach location, Fire Tech's team was up to the task.

Adding a performance-based design twist to the installation, McBride performed a calculation to prove to the Authorities Having Jurisdiction that the ceiling-mounted strobes would provide the required candela, or light intensity, at floor level.



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To ensure the intelligibility or clarity of the system's audio messages, the team went with more speakers at less wattage, all strategically placed.

"We tend to utilize more speakers to get the decibel level and the intelligibility to match," explains Case. "More well-placed speakers means you don't have to turn the volume all the way up, therefore reducing distortion."

When it came to the detection devices, addressability was key. "That's always a plus to have addressable devices, so when something happens, they can identify the location immediately and determine whether it's an actual event that requires evacuation," says McBride.

Relays were also incorporated into the addressable duct detectors for HVAC shutdown, and heat detectors were installed outside the shower area to keep the humidity from tripping smoke detectors.

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A Job Well Done

The job itself only took two months to install. Crediting a great working relationship between the end-user, distributor and fire protection consultant – in conjunction with top-of-the-line equipment – the team describes the project as a prime example of a fast-tracked job.

In addition to the sports arena, the facility houses a weight room, sports medicine department for athletic training, storage areas, and offices for: the vice president of external affairs, athletic compliance, sports information, news bureau, basketball, softball, soccer and volleyball. The crew had to work around academic and campus schedules as facility operations continued throughout the install.

"The school worked with us hand-in-hand, and it was one of those jobs that went just as planned. We couldn't have asked it to be smoother for a facility of that size and age," reflects Case.

The integration of multiple features into one system was noted as a major factor in simplifying the design and installation of the Farenhyt IFP system.

"We looked at other equipment, but it just did not have the capabilities, and would have required adding a lot of parts and pieces," says Case. "Silent Knight's IFP system exceeded the need. Everything is integral within the system, which made for a faster and easier install."

Unlike the typical public address systems or even distributed recipient mass notification solutions such as emails and computer pop-ups, the IFP-1000ECS is fully-supervised. If a speaker or detector is in need of repair or completely off-line, the central monitoring station and NSU facility management are notified immediately.

The fire alarm/emergency communications system, combined with the expanded seating and a new hardwood floor, has really given the coliseum a fresh, new look.

"Everybody is very pleased and we've received lots of compliments for all the improvements we've done," reports Bourg.

With a student population of more than 9,000 spread across NSU's main campus and its satellite locations, the renovated arena can now hold half of the student body.

"I'm very pleased with the products and the end result," states Bourg. "I have a lot of faith in our consultant and contractor, and whatever they recommend, our staff is able to easily use and maintain."

Similarly, McBride observes, "the system has been providing good performance. It's great to work with contractors who know what they're doing, and with good equipment."

Although NSU is currently utilizing its new IFP-1000ECS fire alarm and emergency communications system to send out pre-recorded voice evacuation messages, the system can be easily expanded to offer a faster, more immediate means for disseminating mass notifications in real-time. As many as eight Farenhyt Remote Control Units can be tied-in and conveniently placed throughout the facility to provide authorized personnel quick access to a microphone for live paging and a control board of buttons to disseminate pre-recorded audio messages. All in all, it is an economical system that can be easily upgraded as code requirements or facility changes transpire.

Although NSU's general approach to facility upgrades is to take on projects when it is time to replace older systems, Bourg says he would definitely consider installing a similar combined fire alarm and emergency communications system at some of NSU's other larger facilities such as the theatre and gymnasiums.



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