

# Fire Alarms & Mass Notification Systems – the Same or Different



A fire alarm system is a life-saving necessity for an organization. But is it enough? Aside from legal responsibilities to have a viable system in place, it simply makes sense considering smart business practices, as well as ethical obligations toward human resources and the organization as a whole.

## **A Simple System – Or, is It?**

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) determined that, for companies with ten or fewer employees, a verbal fire alarm system suffices, provided the alarm can reach everyone. Consider these instructions: *“Mary, Bob, there’s a fire! Go out the back door; don’t go through the office – that’s where the fire is. Take that visitor with you. Sue is already out. Joe’s working on the truck outside. Tell him to not come in*

*come in the building. I’m going out the side door after I call the fire department.”* In this simple, but realistic, scenario, all actors know what to do and why they should do it. There is an immediate opportunity for clarification to ensure understanding. This is emergency communication at its best.

Unfortunately, it does not work in facilities with more employees. A technology-derived fire alarm does however work in this larger setting. Still, it is limited in its communication capability and relies solely on anticipation of emergency specifics and training to those responses.

## **Different Emergencies – Different Responses**

In today’s age, we have learned that an organization may face a host of different threats. While appropriate responses to different situations may be similar or even identical, it is quite probable this will not be apparent until the event unfolds.

A fire alarm is aptly called a “fire alarm” because it alerts people to the presence or probability of fire. On sounding of the alarm, affected personnel evacuate the area, typically by the nearest exit. The problem arises when the fire does not cooperate with the evacuation plan. Moreover, emergencies that call for a different response, such as a shelter-in-place or lock-down scenario, do not fit the trained response to a fire alarm.

## **Mass Notification Systems – A Crucial Extension of Your Fire Alarm**

Any threat to your facility is a threat to your staff, business and customers. Adopting a mass notification system as an extension to your fire and gas detection system should be viewed as a critical step to your overall risk management plan.

Mass notification systems facilitate transmission of event-specific instructions to building or area occupants. With such a system, emergency instructions can match the emergency situation and all your risks can be minimized.

## Pending Regulatory Changes

The NFPA 72: National Fire Alarm Code is presently in a revision cycle. The pending changes will impact on older fire alarm systems and may require updates or replacements. Further, NFPA 72 will include a chapter on mass notification systems, instead of the current informatory annex. This will afford the mass notification system the same type of prescriptive standards now afforded fire alarm systems; and, it will have a profound impact on organizations operating under code that adopts the NFPA 72 as its standard. NFPA lists 2010 as the release date for the new document.

## Planning a Way Ahead

Contact your Industronic representative to learn more about the NFPA changes and why now would be a good time to evaluate the feasibility of incorporating a mass notification system into your organization's emergency preparedness.

For more information on how to properly source and implement a MNS, please feel free to contact your local Industronic Representative or our Corporate Headquarters @ 1-866-986-PAGA (7242).

Industronic is one of the worlds leading manufacturers of Industrial Emergency Warning and Mass Notification Systems. All systems comply with the latest regulatory codes. More information on Industronic's systems can be found on the web at [www.industronic.com](http://www.industronic.com) or contacting us via phone.

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