BOMB THREAT at Natick High School

Case Study on crisis communication with
ELERTS Event Alert™

Summary

The ELERTS Event Alert™ app expedited the evacuation of more than 1,400 students, faculty and staff during a bomb threat at Natick High School in Natick, Massachusetts. The app, produced by ELERTS Corporation, allows authorized school personnel and local police to communicate about security concerns using real-time, two-way communication.

Challenges

Every school faces challenges when communicating during an emergency. Before they can respond, first responders need to know what is happening and where. Faculty and staff need to communicate with each other and first responders about the situation in their immediate area and possible locations of bombs, active shooters, or other threats.

It is essential that two-way communication between police and school staff be rapid and discrete. The smartphones that most people carry are ideal communication tools for sharing situation awareness. Mobile phones can utilize GPS location, camera photos and messages created by typed or voice inputs. Police can be better prepared to respond by monitoring the threat situation with their smartphones, even if they are not in radio range.

The U.S. Department of Education recommends countering sudden threats to schools with a situational response that can include lockdown, evacuate, or shelter-in-place. First responders can respond more effectively by having as much eyewitness information as possible.

Solution

ELERTS Event Alert™, a mobile application for iPhone and Android phones, offers fast and efficient communication between safety professionals and school personnel during threatening events. The app enables a shared situational awareness on a contained network. This makes possible an informed decision on the best course of action, based upon what people on the scene are seeing and hearing during the threat.

The app is managed through ELERTS EPICenter web console, with no need for hardware. The app sends messages and photos, with attached GPS information, that give users real-time information as the event unfolds. It is easy to use and requires no training or login to use. App users can monitor the situation from any location that has access to a cell network or Wi-Fi, and the authorities in charge can manage the event even if they are not physically present at the site.

GPS map generated from the location of
a school staff member's report.

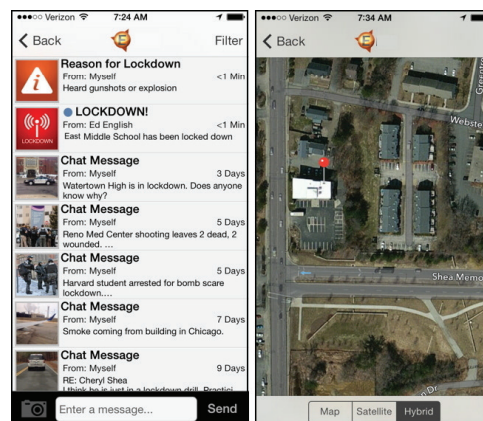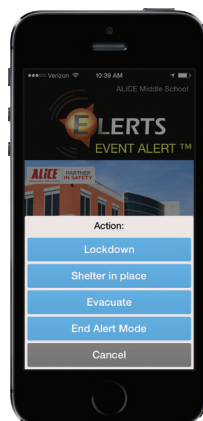Photo sent at 12:43 p.m. showing football field evacuation.

Security Event

On November 14, 2014, the Natick Police Department and Natick High School conducted a pilot test of the ELERTS Event Alert™ app. During the test, the school received a telephoned bomb threat, one repeated that day at four additional Massachusetts high schools. Police initiated the app's alert mode and immediately sent an alert to all Natick High School users. Within one minute, teachers, staff, and first responders submitted details through the app and began to evacuate the school. The chief of police, who was attending a meeting more than 30 miles away, learned of the threat from the ELERTS Event Alert message sent to his phone. He was able to monitor the situation and send a message through the app while traveling back to town.

App users confirmed that all students were evacuated to a pre-determined safe area. A school staff member provided photographic proof that students had congregated on the school's football field. Approximately one hour later, the police chief notified app users that the building had been cleared and students were returning to class. Police and school personnel continued to use the app through the afternoon and evening, until the police chief ended the alert.

Results

ELERTS Event Alert™ assisted school personnel and first responders with the evacuation of more than 1,400 people from Natick High School.

"Bomb threat, no drill"

November 14, 2014	Message sent using ELERTS Event Alert app:	Sent by	Title
Time:			
12:31 PM	Alert Mode begun		SRO
12:31 PM	Reason for Alert Mode: Bomb threat NHS no drill		SRO
12:32	Got it		Technology staff
12:32	keep msgs coming		Chief of Natick Police
12:32	Please confirm this is no drill		School staff- Director
12:32	School evacuated to front lawn		Technology staff
12:34	Got it		Teacher
12:35	Got it, evacuating to football field		School nurse leader
12:43	Here is pic of football field		Technology staff
12:45	Please update central office on situation		School staff- Director
12:52	School is evacuated, waiting on further info		SRO
1:02	Please call transport dept here to determine preschool kids needs		School staff- Director
1:08	No preschool students to be dismissed		SRO
1:14	Please provide status update		School staff- Director
1:15	Getting no answer at the field, Everyone safe. We are just in standby mode at the field.		SRO
1:35	Students are going back to class, regular dismissal time		Chief of Police
1:36	Building has been checked and secured. Dismissing kids, they are returning now		SRO
1:38	Rick, let us know if you need any investigative assistance at the school.		Natick Police Officer
2:26	Test		SRO
2:33	Received		Nurse
2:44	Message received		KMS Principal
2:45	Building cleared		SRO
2:45	Received		Teacher
2:47	Just receiving Elerts		Wilson Middle School secretary
2:58	Received		School staff - student dev
5:51	For record, I didnt receive any elerts until after 3PM post mort briefing with school & NPD		Vice Principal of NHS
6:04	I couldnt open CrisisGo in the school when I sent out the elerts		SRO
6:46	I was receiving everything from this app only		Dir of Park and Rec
7:34	End Alert Mode		
	Good opportunity to test this program		Chief of Police

Activity log for Natick High School bomb threat.

James Hicks, Natick's chief of police, was attending an off-site meeting when the school received the bomb threat. His first notification was the alert from the app. Although he was not in range to use his radio, the app allowed him to remotely manage the event.

"I was out of radio range, so I had no other method to get updates other than from the alert messages," said Hicks. "I was able to follow the event and send a message that I was on the way without disturbing the incident commanders with a phone call."

Police and school personnel were pleased with the app's performance and the ability to monitor an evolving situation. Karen Rufo, nurse leader at Natick High School, said, "I thought it was easy to use and effective in receiving messages about the incident in a timely fashion."

ELERTS Event Alert™ streamlined communication, allowing a fast and steady flow of information between active users in the test group. The app's communication model and simple user interface were very effective over the course of a real and stressful security event.

"The app was extremely easy to use and worked well with the group in the test program," said Hicks. "During the bomb threat, it played out exactly the same. The app will be a time-saver and an efficient method of communicating during an emergency."

The performance of the app comes as no surprise to Ed English, ELERTS chief executive officer.

"The Natick Police Department and Natick High School were so new to using ELERTS Event Alert™, but they used it successfully," said English. "It's a testament to how easy and effective the app is."

ELERTS

ELERTS Corporation (**www.elerts.com**), headquartered in Weymouth, MA, develops best-in-class emergency communication software empowered by community-sourced reporting of safety and security concerns. The company's cloud-based approach leverages smartphone technologies to provide robust, bidirectional communication between multiple parties. ELERTS mobile technology integrates with video surveillance, access control and mass-notification systems. The result is actionable information for emergency situations — to help first responders become faster responders.