

Case Study

Simple Upgrade Affords High-Rise Apartments Dual Fire Alarm and Mass Notification System



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The Augustana Apartments is a 12-story residential building in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The high-rise is managed by Augustana Care, a not-for-profit that offers accommodations for low-income families and disabled persons, from independent and assisted living to skilled nursing and memory care.

Augustana Care's experience with maintaining other properties in Minnesota, Colorado and Wyoming made them well aware that a reliable fire alarm system is a must, particularly within a facility which houses primarily elderly and disabled persons. Beyond fire, management also knew the ability to effectively communicate information and clear instructions pertaining to a variety of possible threats was also a necessity to safeguard the lives of residents.

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When an older elevator at the Augustana Apartments was to be replaced, management realized the high-rise building's aging fire alarm system was ill-equipped to work with the new elevator. In addition to code-mandated functions such as elevator recall, the building's fire alarm must also conform to the city's code for high-rise and residential buildings.

"The previous system was old and obsolete," said Doug Austad, a service tech at Electronic Installations Inc. (EII) who handled the installation, "It just could not handle the elevator replacement."

The old fire alarm and voice systems were pieced together from various makes of technologies, of which the audio portion only offered fire evacuation messages. Austad also pointed out it was only capable of evacuating the entire high-rise, rather than each floor individually. In short, the previous system had outlived its usefulness and needed to be upgraded.



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Austad and his team suggested sticking with Silent Knight, as the building's managers were already familiar with its technologies. Plus the Silent Knight **5820XL-EVS** system could serve both the fire protection and emergency communication needs of the facility, and provide more functionality than the multiple systems it had in place.

“The Silent Knight 5820XL-EVS puts everything together in one system, so it required less parts and wiring. And you’re not dealing with a bunch of different relay boards to control an audio evac,” Austad explained. “It’s easier to program than other systems as well. The voice recording came with 15 pre-recorded messages so you didn’t have to record your own messages. That’s extremely helpful. It’s very intelligent and very versatile.”

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Spot detectors were required throughout the facility, which needed a system to support 115 total points. Facilities such as this must take future growth into consideration too. The 5820XL-EVS control panel's onboard Signaling Line Circuit supports up to 127 points, which can be expanded to accommodate nearly 800 points through the simple addition of expander cards.

The Silent Knight technology's non-proprietary platform was another positive for Augustana that commonly leads to more competitive pricing and avoids Augustana from being locked-in with one fire alarm service provider.

“It’s way more user-friendly than what they had before,” Austad noted. “As a result, it was much easier to train the maintenance guys, because we didn’t have to go to three separate panels - much simpler.”

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The Augustana Apartments are now protected by a robust fire alarm and emergency voice system that is listed as meeting the stringent ANSI/UL 2572 standards for mass notification systems.

EI was able to get the new system up and running quickly, allowing Augustana to move ahead with its elevator project. Considering the 5820XL-EVS's fire alarm and mass notification capabilities coupled with its ease-of-use, Austad feels other senior living facilities would be wise to investigate the solution.

"I'd recommend this system first and foremost because of how easy it is to install and use," he said.

Furthermore, in reflecting on the project, the EI service tech admitted that despite having years of experience in the field, even he was surprised with the system's expansive functionality.



"The fact that it has the capability for the mass notification for tornadoes and other emergencies was extremely impressive," he said. "The Silent Knight system is expandable and flexible beyond what a lot of people might think. I know I was surprised by everything it could do when I first opened up the box and started flipping through the instructions."



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