Project Profile Union College



Union College of Schenectady, NY

For over two centuries, Union College of Schenectady, N.Y. has been one of the nation's leading independent liberal arts colleges. Its mission statement declares the school is “committed to the life of the mind.” A recent investment in a new, campus-wide fire alarm and life safety system is a testament to the school’s dedication to student and staff life safety.

Mike Hilton, Union College's Life Safety officer, realized the campus’ systems were in desperate need of an upgrade when he took on the responsibilities of fire safety management in the late 90s. According to Hilton, the existing system was antiquated in many ways, lacking the intelligence and functionality of modern technology. It utilized copper wiring, which if exposed to various environmental elements, caused countless system troubles and false alarms.

NOTIFIER®
by Honeywell

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"Every time we were hit by a lighting storm," Hilton explains, "we'd have problems with systems throughout the campus and experience thousands of dollars worth of damage."

Hilton considered products from four or five companies before selecting a NOTIFIER networked system of ONYX® Series NFS-640 fire alarm control panels, provided by Alarm and Suppression, Inc. of Glenville, New York.

"NOTIFIER came in with something that would be easy to manage, user-friendly, was cost-competitive, and would allow us to expand in the future at minimal cost," says Hilton. "Plus, Alarm and Suppression, Inc. has always provided us with top-notch support, and has a familiarity with our campus, our long-range plan and unique needs."

THE SOLUTION

Alarm and Suppression's owner, Frank Clair, recommended the NFS-640 system because of the flexibility and adaptability it provides to a large variety of campus buildings. The replacement of many antiquated, conventional panels with this modern, addressable network system greatly reduces false alarms while facilitating faster emergency response times.

Replacement of Union College's old systems began in 1999. "We have upgraded close to twenty-six buildings, and we're in the process of upgrading three additional buildings right now," says Hilton. "It's all part of a fifteen-year plan to upgrade the fire safety systems in all of the school's residential, academic and administrative buildings."

The NFS-640 panels located throughout the 100-acre Union College campus are networked using NOTI-FIRE-NET. This complete system integration provides Hilton and his team with a unified means of system monitoring and control.

All of the new fire alarm systems' exterior transmission lines now run on fiber optic cable, instead of copper wire. While impervious to the effects of lightening, fiber typically provides more accurate, trouble-free fire alarm signal transmissions.

Monitoring of all Union College fire alarm systems is done by the school's own central station located inside its Safety Building. Dispatchers are on-duty 24/7 to notify municipal fire and police departments as well as authorized college security and facility personnel.

A SOUND INVESTMENT

As plans for the Union College upgrades progressed, priority was given to facilities where students commonly reside, especially dormitories. During the retrofit of Richmond Hall, built circa 1955, an ONYX ExitPoint™ system from NOTIFIER was included to improve building evacuation.

The ExitPoint system emits a broadband, directional sound (like white noise) that can be heard across all frequencies of the human hearing range. The sound is distinctive, and does not conflict with traditional fire alarm audible devices, such as horns and bells. Between the sound pulses, optional voice instructions can also be emitted, instructing occupants to "exit here" or to follow the "stairs down."

When a fire alarm is initiated, the NFS-640 fire alarm control panel activates the system's horns, strobes and ExitPoint devices. Through intelligent programming, the NFS-640 panel activates ExitPoint sounders away from the vicinity of heat or smoke. The sequence of sounders is programmed to prevent occupants from heading into danger, rather drawing them to a safe exit, even if located farther away.

The unique technology behind ExitPoint allows it to help occupants pinpoint the nearest exit location, even when visibility is impaired. With more than 250 student residents occupying Richmond Hall, the school thought it was imperative to expand its new life safety system to include this directional sound technology.

"As we upgrade residential buildings with new fire safety systems, we are definitely going to make ExitPoint part of the package," says Hilton. "We will also look at installing ExitPoint in other buildings that have areas of large public assembly."

With at least five more years remaining in the campus-wide upgrade project, Hilton's team and Alarm and Suppression are working hard at integrating NOTIFIER systems into two to three existing buildings a year. Hilton maintains any future buildings are also to include NOTIFIER systems.

"We would not open up a competitive bid for different systems. We'd specify with the contractor, architect or engineer that the distributor shall be Alarm and Suppression and the system shall be NOTIFIER," states Hilton.

A FIRST-HAND EDUCATION IN FIRE SAFETY

Union College administrators and students recently received a first-hand education in the benefits of the NOTIFER system when one of the dormitory rooms at Fox Hall caught fire.

Hilton recalls, "It was actually a very intense electrical fire in the common room that was part of a three room suite. The girls, who were in the bedrooms, heard a crackling noise and the fire alarm had gone off. They went into the common room and saw a fire creeping up the wall. At that point, they immediately exited and luckily, shut the door, limiting fire damage to that room. Meanwhile, because the fire alarm system had activated, the building was evacuated in just seconds, and everyone escaped with no injuries." Hilton asserts, "The NOTIFIER system did its job."

For over 60 years, NOTIFIER has been a leader in the fire alarm industry. Today, we are the largest manufacturer of engineered fire alarm systems with over 400 distributors worldwide, and regional support operations on every continent for the flexibility and options your business needs.

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