Project Profile Veterans Affairs Hospitals



Dallas VA Medical Center

PROTECTING OUR COUNTRY'S VETERANS

There are 152 Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals across the country. At three of those hospitals — the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center in New York, the Grand Junction VA Medical Center in Colorado and the Dallas VA Medical Center in Texas—NOTIFIER fire alarm and emergency communications systems are keeping vets safe when they seek care. All three sites made fire protection upgrades to be expanded across future facility additions.

Colorado VA

The Grand Junction VA Medical Center is a large campus of 17 buildings, serving 37,000 veterans/year. The VA wanted Commercial Specialists, a local NOTIFIER Engineered Systems Distributor, to replace its antiquated protection with a new system that functions as both a fire alarm and emergency communications system.

Performing an upgrade required the existing system to remain active while the NOTIFIER system was installed. The flexible architecture of NOTIFIER's high-speed local area network (LAN), running on fiber-optic cable, allowed fire alarm control panels to be easily added one-by-one.

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The specs called for the capability to disseminate emergency notifications throughout the entire campus, inside and outside. And they wanted the messages to be customizable as well – if there's a fire alarm in building 9, an individualized, pre-recorded message in that building would instruct an evacuation, while patients and staff in the other 16 buildings would not be bothered. At the same time, the VA wanted the ability to all-page the entire campus as needed.

"We put intelligent panels with digital voice control (DVC) in every building; that flexibility really allowed us to tailor the voice messages they wanted and gave the ability for mass notification," said Jason Porter of Commercial Specialists. "The DVC is a real flexible, unique voice evac system. You can pretty much do anything to meet the needs of the customer."

Each building has an NFS2-3030 fire alarm control panel with integrated DVC. All panels are tied to an ONYXWorks workstation, staffed 24/7. The entire network of panels and devices, along with 3-D layouts of every building, are graphically detailed on the workstation, giving the VA system status information in real-time and pinpoint accuracy on the location and details of all events.

"They wanted to be able to get campus-wide information at one location, not to have to go to each building and see what's going on with that system," said Porter.

As is the case with many healthcare facilities, additions are always being made to keep up with new healthcare offerings and growing populations. The Grand Junction VA is no different.

"They just built a new surgery center at the hospital and we're already expanding its system," said Porter.

New York VA

New York's Albany Stratton VA Medical Center was a similar retrofit of a 20-year old, zoned system that was rife with false alarms. The main hospital is 16 floors connected to a number of nearby ancillary buildings and serves approximately 32,000 vets/year.

"They've had problems in the past where they weren't able to locate an alarm on an existing zone," said Brad Nelson of Alarm & Suppression, Inc. "With patient safety involved, they really needed a system that would eliminate that."

Alarm & Suppression and electrical contractor Clifford R. Gray, Inc. installed two ONYXWorks workstations, three DVCs, 13 NFS2-640 fire alarm control panels, five NFS-320 panels and two network annunciators, all on a fiber network carrying digital audio loops and all fire alarm systems.

Nelson also created customized commands in the ONYXWorks system to simplify maintenance. "I've set up macros for them. With one click of a button, they can disable all the strobes, all the elevator recalls, fan shut downs …"

The system also includes 68 digital audio amplifiers to allow for separate, zoned voice communications. As in the Colorado case, when an alarm goes off in one part of a building, that zone gets an individual message.

"They've got a very specific voice evacuation plan, where only in the smoke-zone in-alarm does it activate strobes and an audible alert. The rest of the floor and the rest of the hospital get a different announcement," said Nelson.

According to Nelson, the ease of setting up the points in the field was valuable to the project. With the smoke detectors, pull stations and other initiating devices being addressable, contractors could follow the integrator's plans and install each device without having to fool with the usual dipswitches or bar codes.

As was the case with Grand Junction's VA, Albany's fire protection system had to be expandable with enough capacity to support additions. "They wanted something that was easy to add on to and had a lot of room for future expansions," said Nelson.

Texas VA

The Dallas VA Medical Center covers 84 acres just south of downtown Dallas and serves as the referral center for the VA North Texas Health Care System. According to Johnny Stacy, Sales Manager with local fire and security integrator SSD Systems, the Dallas VA Medical Center, which employs more than 4,500 people and is the second-largest VA in the nation in terms of workload, plans to expand in the next few years.

"The history and reliability of NOTIFIER and its distributor network were the big selling points on the project. And of course the flexibility of the Digital Voice Command system for mass notification." said Stacy

SSD Systems installed fiber-optic cable across the campus, connecting 13 Notifier NFS2-3030 panels with high-speed network cards. These panels will protect 40 buildings containing over 2 million square-feet of space. DVC stations will be installed in all panels to facilitate fire and emergency messaging. Three ONYXWorks workstations will provide the master control and monitoring functionality the facility requires.

Like the other VA hospitals, Dallas officials wanted to be able to pick-up a microphone at one of the workstations and talk to any building. The NOTIFIER systems allow building-specific and entire campus announcements. The NFS2-3030 panels installed by SSD are set-up for individualized messages and as needed, customizable emergency events.

"If there is a tornado, for instance, the system can announce a different message than a fire emergency and amber colored 'Alert' strobes would be used for that event," said Stacy.

Stacy said the fact that he's working on a project that will keep veterans safe was not lost on him. His father, a World War II vet, was in the transitional care facility at the Dallas VA Medical Center for some time.

"To get them a dependable system that works...I'm very humbled by it," said Stacy.

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