Radio Callbox System Improves Safety for California Schools

In need of a communication system for authorized access to campus facilities, a California elementary school installs a two-way radio callbox system that fits time and budget constraints.

A fixed location callbox allows a visitor or vendor to talk directly to radio-equipped personnel for faster and safer access to school facilites.

Security is paramount in schools of all types and sizes - and access control is the key to increased security. But the growing trend towards multi-purpose facilities which include Extended Day Care, sports, gymnasium, and cafeteria – complicates that need. The sheer volume of people coming and going, coupled with the diversity of their reasons for visiting heightens the need for a flexible solution to access control which allows immediate communication and coordination with the correct staff personnel. A California school district addressed this problem with the purchase of wireless radio callboxes. The result is a streamlined process – allowing parents to pick up their children from this multi-use building environment – while maintaining strict security.

Security is More than Locked Doors

Previously, the school district security protocol called for all doors of the multi-use facilities to be locked from the inside, but there was no real system in place to handle visitors. Parents or vendors would knock on the door until someone from the staff answered the door and assessed the situation. Despite having gates and locked doors, school district officials recognized the need for a more efficient and practical solution that would still provide authorized access to certain buildings. They sought a solution that would allow a higher level of flexibility, productivity and greater control by teachers and staff – because they realize that parents picking up their children have different needs from that of vendors delivering supplies. They found their answer in a wireless radio callbox.

How the System Works

The Ritron callbox is a specially designed, American-made two-way radio transceiver with built-in application specific features and a rugged, weather-proof mechanical enclosure and internal antenna, it is used to communicate directly with the radio-equipped school personnel through their campus frequency. Each radio callbox includes a vandal-resistant, stainless steel push-to-talk button, an internal antenna, a speaker and a microphone which allows the user to talk to and then listen to the response. Although the units can be hard-wired for "always on" applications, in this instance they are powered by 6 D-cell batteries – so no wiring was required. Installation time for each callbox was accomplished in less than an hour/callbox.

When the push-to-talk button on the callbox is pressed, the visitor's message is broadcast to all radio-equipped personnel over the campus frequency. The appropriate school personnel can then reply – confirming the parent identity and advising them of their timing. Although some versions of the callbox allow remote activation of gate controllers, doors, barrier arms and strobe lights connected to the callbox, the security protocol of this school district requires that a radio-equipped teacher or staff member physically answer and open the door to allow access.

"Overall the Ritron callbox was the best fit for this application" said Gene Hanson, Operations Manager for Applied Technology Group, Inc, of Bakersfield. "They are affordable enough for schools to budget for, easy to program and install, and they just plain work when you deploy them."

Since the callboxes are programmed to the campus frequency – all radio equipped personnel hear the message, and the appropriate staff member can respond. Parents can now pick up their children from extended daycare, or a sports practice, or some other after-school event, they press the large "push to talk" button on the callbox. A designated, radio equipped staff member then confirms the parent's identity and physically travels to the door to allow the parent access into the building.

In addition to facilitating child pick-up, several school locations within the district have also employed the callbox system at rear delivery entrances so that food vendors and other delivery persons can be quickly identified and allowed access without having to leave doors unlocked.

Food items can be delivered virtually anytime, and any day. Identifying what is being delivered up front enables cafeteria officials to have correct personnel meet the delivery to quickly unload and store the incoming items. Previously, whoever was closest to the door would answer it – and often it was not the desired person to handle the delivery. Now radio equipped personnel are alerted when a visitor presses the button and announces themselves – saving time and effort for all parties involved. Access can be granted to appropriate personnel without leaving any doors unlocked.

"This process certainly helps the school with increased security, but it has also made them more responsive to delivery driver needs – speeding them to their next location" said Hanson

Students and teachers can go about their day knowing they are secured with a communications network limiting access to only approved individuals.

Simple Wireless Installation Saves Time and Money

All campuses within this district have at least one callbox installed. Each callbox is powered by 6 D-cell batteries, allowing them to be installed at any desired location without the need for wiring. This simplifies installation and reduces installation costs significantly. To further extend battery life, the callboxes at this installation were set to automatically turn OFF after 10-seconds of inactivity.

In addition to faster and more appropriate response times, the Ritron callbox enhances school productivity as all teachers and staff members are actively engaged until called.

Video Tells the Story

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a moving picture must be priceless. When school district officials began researching their options for an access control system, Gene Hanson of Applied Technology Group, Inc., their local radio systems provider, guided them to the Ritron web site and the callbox video.

"Using the Ritron web site and product demo video, school district decision-makers were able to see the callbox in action. It allowed district officials to quickly see for themselves that security and efficiency could be dramatically improved by installing callboxes at locked doors." recalled Hanson.

About Ritron Inc. - Founded in 1977, Ritron, Inc., is a privately held U.S. company specializing in the design and manufacture of RF wireless voice and data communication products. It offers wireless solutions for commercial, industrial, military, OEM and integrator markets. For more information call 800-872-1872 or visit our web site at www.ritron.com.