IntelliGuard SYSTEMS™
SAFEGUARDING YOUR COMMUNITY

Protecting Our Children

An easy step we can all agree on.

Recently the Washington Post published a story saying that more than 300 college presidents, "have signed a letter urging Congress to enact new gun controls in the aftermath of December's elementary school massacre in Connecticut." Other university presidents have declined to sign the letter reflecting the broader fact that gun control remains a complicated and divisive issue, and that's simply not going to change anytime soon. Yet in the meantime, one thing we can all agree on is that our schools do need to be safer, even as the protracted gun control debate may never end.

In that regard, there is one major step forward that can be taken immediately. The time has come to recognize that our mass emergency alert systems, such as those employed by nearly every major college and university in the United States, have been built on the wrong technical platform, and one that time and time again has proven to fail in this task.

Simply put, today's mass emergency alerts systems have erroneously been built on cellular networks while they need to be based on a one-to-many broadcasting protocol such as paging.

Anyone who experienced the Virginia centered earthquake that shook the entire D.C. area remembers that day quite clearly. Within minutes it was difficult if not impossible to make a phone call and even plain text messages could not be sent or received. Ask any expert who works within the cellular industry if those networks are suitable for mass emergency alerts and they will all tell you that they are not. Even the 911 Commission stated in their summary report, that paging was the only protocol that could be relied upon for this purpose.

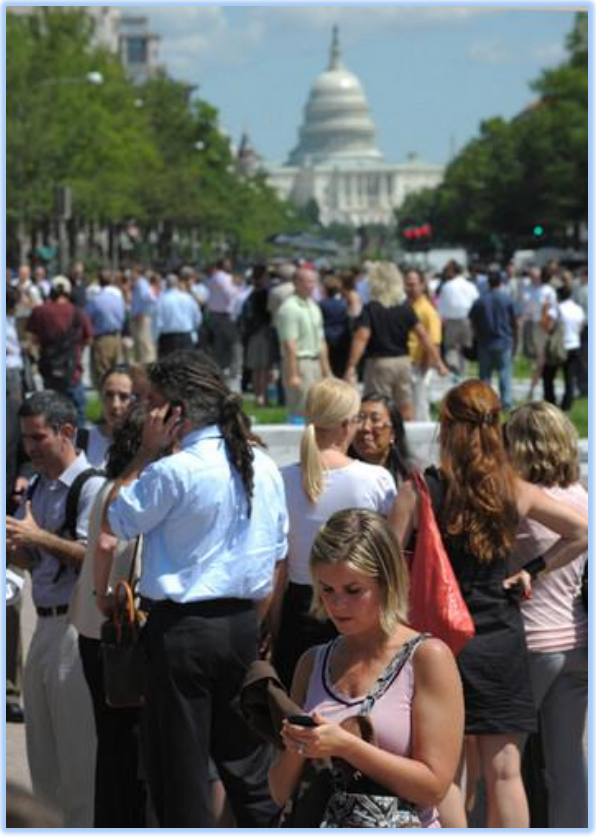

Photo: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

As stated in the 911 Commission report: "Almost all aspects of communications continue to be problematic, from initial notification to tactical operations. Cellular telephones were of little value. . . . Radio channels were initially oversaturated. . . . Pagers seemed to be the most reliable means of notification when available and used, but most firefighters are not issued pagers."

At a time when every second counts in dispensing life saving information, (such as shooters on a campus) the only thing we can count on is that the systems currently being employed will quickly become overloaded and fail.

On the other hand, the best example of why a broadcast based, one-to-many system can never be overloaded occurred this past summer when an estimated 1 billion people simultaneously watched the opening ceremony of the Olympics from London. Needless to say, nobody lost their signal because too many TV sets were tuned in to the same channel.

Today, many colleges and universities have put in place emergency alert systems that may offer ten or more "layers" including everything from loudspeakers, to Facebook and Twitter alerts, to automated e-mails and robo-calls. In a recent survey on emergency management conducted by Campus Safety Magazine, 64% of the responding institutions said that they agreed with the statement that their campus was adequately prepared to respond to an active shooter incident. Their confidence levels were even higher when asked if they agreed that they were prepared to communicate during a weather emergency (92%) or a natural disaster like an earthquake (89%).

Photo: www.samhurdphotography.com

I believe the actual number is closer to zero.
Paging technology is still employed today by millions of users in hospitals, first responders, and security forces whose jobs require immediate and foolproof messaging. It's not news however, to say that pagers have largely disappeared from the lives of most everyone else thanks to the proliferation of amazing cellular products and networks.

Products and networks, by the way, that work great. Great that is for most everything other than mass emergency alerts.

Let me put it this way: when AT&T or Verizon need to communicate with their own people in the field during an emergency, they PAGE them.

There are many examples from even the past few years of dangerous and even deadly occurrences on campuses where students, faculty and staff received emergency alerts hours after the school transmitted messages of the danger. Making matters worse, once the messages are received, they can even come in the wrong order from which they were sent, adding chaos to an already deadly situation.

So if the answer to ensuring immediate delivery of life saving information is so simple, then why is it that few if any campuses are using mobile, one-to-many technology today? There are a couple of reasons:

First, they aren't required to by law. The federally mandated Clery Act does require colleges and universities to immediately notify their campus of dangerous situations, but "notify" simply means to ***send*** the message.
There is no requirement that it be ***received*** by the very people whose lives are in danger.

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Second, it is fair to say that no self-respecting student is going to walk around with a clunky pager on his or her belt. Fortunately however, thanks to miniaturization, that is no longer an issue. With today's technology, paging receivers can be implanted into devices that are used every day by students such as a computer thumb drive. These devices will simultaneously receive an emergency message within 20 seconds of transmission whether the school has 1,000 people on campus or 1 million.

We already saw during the Japanese tragedy in the aftermath of the deadly tsunami, that a reported 14 million people used mobile broadcasts to receive potentially life-saving information. While it will be some time before mobile broadcasting is fully deployed in the United States, broadcasting to miniaturized paging devices is already a reality.

At a time when we are all searching for ways to protect our children, and with the full recognition by the White House, the FCC and many members of Congress, that we must find better solutions to mass, emergency alerts, the time has come to employ the only system broadly available today to ensure transmission and receipt of life saving messages. It is time to move from emergency cellular messaging to a one-to-many broadcast technology.

About Allan Horlick

Allan Horlick has spent decades in the broadcasting industry as President of both WRC and WUSA-TV, as the President of CNBC and NBC Europe based in London, and as the Director of Launch Operations for CNBC and NBC Asia based in Hong Kong. Today, Horlick oversees multiple Washington based television talk shows and also consults on a campus safety initiative.

About IntelliGuard Systems

IntelliGuard is an emergency alert system that communicates critical information to unlimited recipients and locations simultaneously in seconds. It was designed to overcome the specific challenge of delivering simultaneous emergency alerts to anyone on a campus, no matter where they're located.

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