case study

Hurricane Sandy raged across the Eastern Seaboard of the United States during the last week of October 2012. A fundamental requirement during the storm was to make sure people were safe and informed.

Used by more than 530 organizations in a dozen states during Sandy, Honeywell Instant Alert® sent over 7 million messages that included details on school, business and government closures; comfort station locations; and more to keep people up-to-date and out of harm's way.

Honeywell

KEEPING PEOPLE INFORMED AND SAFE IN THE EYE OF A HURRICANE

Hurricane Sandy reached land the week of Oct. 29, 2012, and was the largest hurricane to ever hit the mid-Atlantic and Eastern Shore of the U.S. Some areas were without power for 13 days or longer once the storm was in full force. With power outages and sporadic cell phone service common, finding a reliable way to communicate with people to ensure safety was perhaps the biggest challenge many organizations and public entities faced.

Power outages affected the ability to send and receive email and phone calls, while sporadic cell phone service compromised text messages and phone calls. Telephone line issues meant landline phones couldn't be relied on either. Because organizations could not depend on any one specific communication channel, Instant Alert's ability to contact people on multiple devices simultaneously became vitally important.

Throughout the storm, Instant Alert was used in a variety of ways — and for a variety of purposes — to help organizations deliver notifications to ensure that people were informed and safe.

Novartis Remains Productive With Instant Alert

In addition to using Instant Alert to send information to ensure employee safety, Novartis, a health care solutions provider, used Instant Alert during the storm to maintain employee productivity.

Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis has a campus in New Jersey comprised of over 30 buildings across 180 acres, plus off-site leased buildings. Novartis' first goal was to ensure employee safety, offering information on shelter, showers, phone charging stations and fuel availability. For employees who were safe and able to work, Novartis' next goal was to keep them productive by providing information on work locations.

During Sandy, the leased buildings at Novartis experienced power outages and closed right after the hurricane hit shore, while most of the other campus buildings were open for work. Novartis sent Instant Alert messages by business unit and building, so only the people who needed information regarding power outages or closures received them.

Novartis' Instant Alert messages offered employees the option to work from home or use "hotel" spaces on the main campus. All told, Novartis sent 122,000 individual messages during Sandy.

"Employees love the system," said Scott Thompson, Novartis director of security engineering. "Instant Alert isn't intended to replace emails and notifications for day-to-day communications, so we use it sparingly, only during emergencies, to ensure that people pay attention when a communication is pushed out."

To ensure that as many employees as possible are contacted by Instant Alert, all employees' user names, emails and work phone numbers are preloaded into the Instant Alert database. Employees are then asked to log in and add personal cell numbers, home phone numbers and SMS addresses. To date, more than 90 percent of employees participate in Instant Alert.

During Hurricane Irene in 2011, the connection to the command center based on campus was lost; however, because Instant Alert is cloud-based, Thompson was still able to send messages about closures from his home. During Hurricane Sandy, Thompson was evacuated to another state and again was able to access Instant Alert from anywhere in order to communicate critical information to Novartis employees.

School Achieves Fast Set-Up For Rapidly Approaching Storm

At the Caldwell-West Caldwell School District in New Jersey, Dr. James Heinegg had taken the reins as superintendent in July 2012. One of his first orders of business was selecting a notification system to ensure the safety of the district's 2,650 students, 230 teachers and 225 administrators and support staff in seven buildings. Instant Alert was selected in September 2012 with a goal of installing the system by Thanksgiving. But the late-October forecast announced the imminent arrival of Hurricane Sandy, and the need for Instant Alert became immediate.

Thanks to quick work between the district and Honeywell, Instant Alert was up and running in 24 hours — just 48 hours before Sandy hit. While the district believed it would only be used to close school on the Monday and Tuesday after Sandy hit, it turned into a vital daily communication tool. Caldwell used Instant Alert 20 times over two weeks to keep parents and staff informed and students safe.

"We would not have been surprised had Honeywell come back to us and said they couldn't get the system up and running that quickly," said Heinegg. "But they were able to get everything ready in record time. Plus we were able to send unlimited messages with no additional budget impact."

If Instant Alert had not been in place before the hurricane, much of the communication would have been done via phone chain or call tree, which would have been problematic. Call trees become unstable if one person in the tree is unable to call an assigned call list. In addition, most landline phones today need a power source to operate, so if the power failed, people may have been unable to make/receive calls. And while cell phones may not have been impacted by power outages initially, if cell towers were out of service, then calls would not have been delivered. All of these situations would have caused a call tree failure, so being able to reach parents and guardians via multiple modes of communication became essential to the reliable delivery of messages.

Caldwell first used Instant Alert during Sandy to let people know about school closings, but quickly realized it could be a valuable tool to send reminders about curfews and to encourage parents and guardians to keep their kids away from school grounds due to safety issues related to downed power lines and debris in the streets.

In addition to school announcements, Caldwell sent messages on behalf of local government. While the local government had its own notification system and distribution list, administrators wanted to make sure as many people knew about power outages as possible. They recognized the effectiveness of the district's Instant Alert system and asked Caldwell to send community messages as well.

Using Instant Alert Extensively In Jefferson Township

When Jefferson Township, located in Morris County, N.J., went through Hurricane Irene in October 2011, they set up shelters and warming centers for residents and communicated about them via road-side message boards and the township website. Jefferson's shelters were open for up to five days, but only had about 150 visitors. Post-Irene, the township realized it needed to communicate more effectively with citizens. They distributed a request for proposal and ultimately selected Instant Alert to achieve this.

Throughout Hurricane Sandy, Jefferson used Instant Alert 34 times for a total distribution of 125,000 alerts. The first order of business was ensuring the security of citizens, so during the storm, a morning message addressed safety and encouraged people to check on neighbors, the elderly and people with special needs. Evening messages focused on where to locate comfort stations, get water and find additional information.

The township accommodated 2,300 comfort station visitors during Sandy. Of those visitors, 75 percent learned about the shelter through Instant Alert. Approximately 1,800 of the township's 6,000 residents had registered for Instant Alert at the start of the storm. Community Emergency Response Team members at the comfort stations enlisted additional residents for future alerts and added nearly 1,100 people. People who register can also list their addresses, so if the township chose to, it could use map-based alerting to specific geographic areas for situations like a neighborhood evacuation or an isolated power outage.

During the storm, 93 percent of the township was without power, at which point residents started installing generators. This resulted in numerous calls to the fire department regarding carbon monoxide alarms in homes. Instant Alert was used to send a notice to residents to move generators away from their homes, and the calls dramatically decreased.

When police headquarters also lost power and had no internet or phone connections during Sandy, Ed Mangold, deputy office of emergency management coordinator for Jefferson Township, was able to send alerts from his laptop at a remote location.

How Instant Alert Can Help Your Organization

Honeywell Instant Alert is used by thousands of organizations throughout the nation to deliver vital information, and can send hundreds of thousands of messages in minutes. Instant Alert allows people to receive timely, accurate information in any situation, thereby helping organizations focus their resources on ensuring that people are safe. Instant Alert offers multi-modal, cloud-based communications, and gives organizations the ability to send unlimited messages at one set price.

"We have received nothing but positive feedback about Instant Alert from citizens during and after Hurricane Sandy," said Mangold. "People today have so many options for providing negative, anonymous feedback, but all of the comments about Instant Alert were extremely positive."

Find Out More

To learn more about Honeywell Instant Alert, visit **honeywell.com/buildingsolutions** or call **1-800-345-6770, ext. 605**.

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