Taking the complexity out of life safety management

How remote activity monitoring informs and simplifies

Managing life safety systems can be challenging for a facilities manager – particularly when managing more than one building in a campus, city-wide or regional environment. Every fire alarm control unit in an environment represents a discrete set of alarms, alerts and maintenance records and schedules. Each one may require a different response process when there's a problem. When problems occur, users there may not be a knowledgeable person on site to evaluate the situation and provide the proper response. With other security and building automation systems to manage, the challenges can compound quickly.

Remote activity monitoring has been developed to address these challenges by providing greater visibility and control. This white paper explains the problems that remote activity monitoring solves, how it solves them and the benefits that can be expected.

The limitations of unconnected fire alarm control unit

For decades, there was a notable lack of connectivity and remote monitoring capabilities with fire alarm systems. Consequently, users were compelled to physically visit the building premises to conduct routine testing, maintenance, diagnosis, and repairs of the fire alarm system.

As life safety systems grew in sophistication, they gained the ability to capture and record more information from individual initiation and notification devices on the network, as well as storing building-wide information, such as event logs and maintenance and inspection records. However, to obtain any of that information about the life safety system, users still had to consult the control unit in person. This has made facilities management difficult in several ways:

Excessive time demands: Every time an issue occurred with a fire panel or timely information about a particular life safety system was needed, it required a physical trip to the building in question to get answers. With multiple control units or systems in multiple buildings across a broad area, that's a significant amount of time spent going from building to building.

No backup for on-site expertise shortages: There might not be a trained life safety system operator on site when a problem arises. Is it something serious or can it wait until a more convenient time? It's hard to know immediately, and trying to diagnose a problem over the phone with an untrained person on site can be frustrating.

Unnecessary site visits: When away from a facility and a problem occurs, there can be a lack of information needed to accurately assess the situation. To be safe and certain, an on-site visit may be required. Oftentimes, it could be a minor issue that did not require immediate attention, disrupting lives and wasting time.

Greater difficulty managing maintenance and service: All life safety systems require regular maintenance and service. The more fire alarm systems in an environment, the harder it is to track and manage each system's maintenance history. This makes it more challenging to schedule maintenance efficiently and avoid disruption.

Remote activity monitoring can eliminate these difficulties, providing greater visibility and control while simplifying job duties.

What is a remote activity monitoring solution?

A life safety remote activity monitoring solution is an internet protocol (IP)-based system that accesses information from each fire control unit and sends it to a secure cloud storage system. From there, the information can be sent to a central monitoring station and also made available to one or more users via the internet through a web browser or mobile device. This makes just about all the information within the connected fire system – including alarms, troubles, maintenance alerts and system logs accessible essentially anytime and anywhere.

A typical remote activity monitoring solution consists of several components working in concert:

- **A gateway** installed in each fire alarm system transmits data via a local area network (LAN) or wireless cellular network to the cloud.
- **A secure, managed cloud database** collects and hosts the data. Multi-layer access control gives users access to their fire alarm systems, whether it is a single control unit in a single building, or multiple units spread over multiple sites.
- **A web-based dashboard** receives real-time events from the cloud via the internet, displays it for users, and provides the capability to search historical events and view reports and logs for each control unit.
- **A mobile app** offers users the same capabilities as the dashboard via their mobile devices.

Result: improved visibility and control

Remote activity monitoring solutions provide facilities managers with a range of benefits that add up to improved visibility and control:

- **Easily monitor and manage multiple locations:** With a remote activity monitoring solution, information from all life safety control unit in every building, across campuses and multiple locations, is always within easy reach. Total visibility is finally within reach – with the ability to grant access to service providers as well.
- **Improve service efficiency and quality:** With visibility into what's happening in each system and logs, planning maintenance to minimize disruption and maximize efficiency is easier than ever. Remote access also allows remote engineers to view data and help on-site technicians correct problems.
- **Enjoy better safety:** Through the use of a mobile app and push notifications, a remote activity monitoring solution gets critical information anywhere, enabling a faster, more appropriate response.
- **Get easy access to information and reports:** At any time, connect to each fire alarm control unit's data via the web user interface to see exactly what's happening and review system logs.
- **Save time and improve productivity:** With detailed information always available – whenever, wherever – wasting time traveling to each building when an event occurs is drastically reduced and it's quick and easy to review system logs.
- **Gain peace of mind:** With improved visibility and control, all the "what-ifs" become a worry of the past.

Who can benefit most from remote activity monitoring?

Remote activity monitoring is ideally suited to facilities managers overseeing campus or multi-campus environments. School districts with multiple buildings can monitor and manage their life safety systems at all locations from a single workstation. Hospitality management chains operating multiple hotels in a geographic area can coordinate maintenance and service among them. And commercial real estate management firms can respond quickly and effectively to alerts from any of the fire alarm systems in their portfolio.

Learn more

As a global leader in both smart building and fire protection solutions, Johnson Controls can provide a remote activity monitoring solution that can help you better safeguard people and property – and simplify your life.

To learn more, visit:
visit www.johnsoncontrols.com/fire-detection

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*IMPORTANT: SafeLINC Cloud is intended to complement central station monitoring for fire alarm systems and enhance your ability to manage your fire and life safety systems effectively. SafeLINC Cloud is not a substitute for real-time central station monitoring of your fire alarm system.