

**Emergency Phone Program**  
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## **Abstract**

*Testing and maintenance of University emergency phones was haphazard at best, utilizing Police Officers' random observations and testing of phones and emergency lighting on bluelight stations throughout campus. Telephone problems were reported to the Florida State University Office of Telecommunications while lighting and electrical problems were reported to FSU Facilities, Operations & Maintenance. Reporting was random and inconsistent due to their much higher priority of law enforcement.*

## **Florida State University**

Florida State University, established in 1851, is a comprehensive, national graduate research University that puts research into action for the benefit of our students and society. With an impressive breadth of leading graduate, professional and undergraduate programs, and an international reputation in the sciences and humanities, Florida State University is a demanding and intellectually stimulating environment for students and faculty.

With the inception of Emergency Phones around campus and the program discussed in this submission, students, faculty and staff as well as visitors to the campus have a feeling of security in being able to reach help, if needed.

### **Statement of the Problem/Initiative**

Because of the inconsistent nature of testing emergency telephones on campus, and because there was a lack of confidence in the operability of the emergency phones, the University recognized the need to develop solid procedures and processes for routinely checking emergency phone operations.

### **Design**

The University made a commitment to hire and train an emergency phone program technician who would be responsible for routine testing, maintenance and repairs of the bluelight stations on campus. Funding for this initiative would be shared campus-wide through an Emergency Phone Program Adder Fee to be attached as an additional charge to each phone line on campus. Salary, benefits, and the costs of maintenance and repairs would be recouped on a year-to-year basis, recovering the costs of the program.

### **Implementation**

In 2002, the Office of Telecommunications hired a full-time OPS employee whose responsibility it was to test and repair the bluelight emergency telephones. OPS employees are not salary employees and do not receive standard University benefits. When it later became obvious that the value of this technician warranted a full-time staff position, the position was changed to a salaried position with benefits.

In 2003, the emergency phone program technician implemented two different types of monitoring software to monitor the two types of emergency phones on campus at that time: Code Blue and Talk-a-Phone. This monitoring software allowed the

technician to check reports daily and locate phone line problems. The efficiencies realized with this remote monitoring were immediate, allowing the technician to pinpoint problems without having to physically inspect the poles. However, this software did not provide data concerning other problems such as lighting outages and volume control problems.

Consequently, the technician also maintained a 30-day vigil whereby all emergency phones were physically inspected at least once during each 30-day period. That procedure is still in place today, even though the emergency phones have grown in numbers from approximately 200 in 2002 to 365 today.

Another inefficiency observed by the new technician was the reporting of lighting outages to a separate department (Facilities, Operations & Maintenance). It became clear that the replacement of lights by the OTC technician would be far more efficient than reporting them to another department and waiting for that department to schedule the replacement. Hence, in 2004 the OTC emergency phone program technician took over the responsibility of replacing lighting when it was discovered out during monthly physical inspections. Appropriate stock was added to OTC inventory to facilitate easy and speedy access to the variety of required lights used on bluelight poles and wall mount units. Electrical problems that require a certified electrician, however, are still reported to Facilities, Operations & Maintenance.

The technician further observed and reported that the Code Blue emergency telephones were failing at an alarming rate. In a lightning-prone region such as Florida, thunderstorms and severe lightning are regular threats to outdoor equipment such as bluelight poles. Although efforts were made to protect phones with heavy-duty surge

suppressors, these efforts failed more frequently on the Code Blue phones in the field. Talk-a-Phone instruments, on the other hand, appeared to stand up to storm conditions much more effectively. As a result, the technician worked with vendors to secure pricing on Talk-a-Phone new poles and compatible replacement instruments that resulted in significant savings to the University. The standard for the University's emergency phones was officially changed in 2006 and all new and replacement phones adhere to this new standard.

Campus standards for emergency phone outages have been implemented and are quite strict in the interest of the safety expectations of our community. Bluelight phones that cannot be repaired within one day must be covered ("bagged") so that passers-by are aware the unit is out of order. Bluelight poles cannot be "bagged" more than five days, lest they must be physically removed. This strict policy provides the impetus required to grant these repairs the highest priority, and rarely is a pole removed because it cannot be repaired within the five-day maximum.

Campus elevator phones are now considered part of the emergency phone program as well. The program technician adheres to a 24-hour turnaround standard for elevator phone outages. Those that cannot be repaired within 24 hours are covered with a large laminated sign advising elevator riders of the phone outage and enabling them to decide whether to proceed or evacuate the elevator car in lieu of another access method.

An initiative was recently begun to integrate bluelight stations with other campus emergency alert systems. The Office of Telecommunications is currently integrating bluelights with its Red Alert System such that bluelights can be turned on remotely through this emergency notification system. Coupled with recently installed emergency

sirens, the use of bluelight strobing will be used to further stress an emergency situation and the need to pay attention to announcements and signals.

The impact of the Emergency Phone Program Adder Fee has been minimal on any given department. With each line currently charged \$2.33 per month, the departments have not expressed concerns in light of the benefits the entire University gains through this program dedicated to emergency needs and response.

### **Benefits**

The establishment of the Emergency Phone Program has benefited the University in a multitude of ways.

- Thanks to the reliability of the bluelight stations, a life was saved late in 2004 when a visitor to campus suffered a heart attack and used a bluelight station nearby to summon assistance.
- Confidence is at an all-time high that bluelight stations will operate effectively when they are most needed.
- A recent University Safety Walk, organized by Student Government and including faculty, staff and police personnel, proved that the program is successful. The Safety Walk documentation reported very few issues with bluelight emergency stations, none of which were as extreme as a non-working phone.
- The University has and will continue to save scarce monetary resources due to the decision to use Talk-a-Phone as a standard instrument. Fewer instrument failures and lower costs for new and replacement instruments lead to significant cost savings.

In the interest of safety for all faculty, staff, students and visitors, establishing the Emergency Phone Program at FSU was an extremely wise step. Recent tragic violent events on other campuses reinforce the commitment to ensure that emergency phones and lighting should be a high priority for campus administrators.