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UCSB Installs First of Five Emergency Communication Speakers

The first of what UC Santa Barbara officials hope will be a network of five mass notification warning system speakers has been installed on the roof of Kerr Hall in the heart of the UCSB campus.

According to Associate Vice Chancellor Ron Cortez, who oversees emergency operations management at UCSB, the speakers will allow the campus to communicate information to students, faculty, and staff in the event of an emergency. Alerts and other notifications will be broadcast over the speakers, telling people where to go and what to do during a campus emergency.

Eventually, Cortez said, the campus hopes to have other speakers located at the Recreation Center, Kohn Hall, Santa Rosa Hall, and the Faculty Club. He said plans call for all five to be installed in the next 12 months.

Each of the speakers will have a range of 2,400 feet at 70 decibels. The network, called the Notifier Mass Notification System, is designed and manufactured by Honeywell. The speakers are manufactured by Whelen Corporation.

"One of the keys to our success in handling any type of emergency is redundancy of communication," Cortez said. "It can't be just one type of communication to notify the campus in the event of an emergency. Any time we're using technology, one of the systems might fail, so we need to have different ways to reach people on

campus."

The speakers will enhance the campus's existing emergency notification system, which includes e-mails and text alerts to faculty, students, and staff. Alerts are also available to those who are fans of the UCSB Alert page on Facebook.

The emergency broadcast messages will originate at the dispatch center of the UCSB Police Department. "Police department dispatchers will use a telephone to speak directly into the system speakers," Cortez said. "They will also have 12 prerecorded messages they can use, depending on the emergency."

Campus officials considered other systems, including one that would have required 30 speakers throughout the campus. "With this one, it's five," Cortez said. "Aesthetically, these are nicer, too. They're high, up on top of buildings. You can't really see them."

The new system will be linked to a pre-existing Notifier fire alarm system in several of the buildings chosen for installation. And, Cortez pointed out, buildings were picked not just because of their locations around campus, but also because each has an emergency generator. "So even when we have a loss of power, they will still be able to broadcast to the campus," he said. "If we lost power in Kerr Hall, we would still be able to use it, which is important in emergencies like earthquakes or fires.

"The Notifier system will provide another layer of notification for the campus," Cortez said. "I think it will really increase our capacity to handle an active shooter incident, which is a really tough one to handle because they happen so quickly. The most important thing in that case is communication. I think it will be very beneficial to the campus."

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