

Missouri Alert Network - Background and Key Questions

MISSOURI ALERT NETWORKSM

Background and Key Questions

On August 28, 2007, Missouri Governor Matt Blunt and Dr. Carter D. Ward, Executive Director, Missouri School Boards' Association, and others announced the Missouri Alert NetworkSM, hereafter called Network. The Network is an innovative, collaborative initiative and partnership of the State of Missouri and the Missouri School Boards' Association intended to enhance the safety and security of Missouri's school children, grades kindergarten through twelve, and others. On February 19, Governor Blunt, Dr. Ward, and Dr. Robert Stein, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Higher Education, and others, announced that the Missouri Alert Network was being extended to higher education institutions in Missouri.

1. What is the Network?

The Network is a state-level, rapid notification and information distribution system so that in the event of an emergency or such other unusual circumstance that impacts the safety and security of school children and persons who work in schools, grades kindergarten through twelve, or higher education institutions, there will be (at least) one contact to receive an appropriate voice, text, and/or email message from the State of Missouri.

2. What is the purpose of the Network?

The purpose of the Network is to ensure that Missouri's schools and higher education institutions remain safe. This necessarily means that (a) school and higher education officials and administrators and others may have a need for information from state public safety officials about emergent situations (including information that abates rumors that impact safety and security); and (b) the information be provided efficiently and effectively - within minutes.

3. Is there not a similar network already in place in Missouri?

No, there is not a means currently in place for state-level public safety officials to simultaneously communicate to all school districts or higher education institutions in Missouri, or to school districts or higher education institutions in a particular region in the state, within minutes with a voice, text, and/or email message. In Missouri and throughout the United States, a number of school districts and higher education institutions presently utilize alert notification technology. Among school districts and colleges and universities, the application of this technology is varied - ranging from regular use to no use at all. The innovative features of the Network are: (a) the provision of a state-level communication mechanism that provides the opportunity for all school

districts and higher education institutions to benefit from the technology to enhance safety and security; and (b) the partnership between the State of Missouri and the Missouri School Boards' Association that has resulted in the Network.

4. Who will make the decision to activate the Network, if necessary, and send an emergency alert to school districts or higher education institutions?

Officially, a decision to activate the Network will be made by the Governor or the Governor's designee. (The decision will not be made by the Missouri School Boards' Association.) The day-to-day control and management of the Network is vested with the Missouri Department of Public Safety. As such, activation and test protocols of the Network are determined by the Missouri Department of Public Safety. The Missouri School Boards' Association has responsibility for promoting awareness and distributing information about the Network and collecting necessary data from Network participants.

5. Is there a cost to the State of Missouri for the Network?

No, there is not a cost to the State of Missouri for the Network. As already mentioned, the Network is an innovative, collaborative initiative and partnership of the State of Missouri and the Missouri School Boards' Association.

6. Can all schools and higher education institutions in Missouri, public and nonpublic, participate in the Network? Is participation mandatory?

Participation in the Network is open to all kindergarten through grade twelve schools in Missouri - public and nonpublic - except "home schools" and Missouri's higher education institutions. As previously indicated, in the event of an emergency or such other unusual circumstance that impacts the safety and security of schools or colleges and universities, the Network is intended to provide an appropriate voice, text, and/or email message from the State of Missouri to (at least) one contact in a school district or higher education institution.

It is not mandatory for schools or higher education institutions to take part in the Network. Participation in the Network is voluntary, though strongly recommended.

7. Is there a cost to schools to participate in the Network?

There is no cost to schools to have one contact in a district to receive an appropriate voice, text, and/or email messages from the Network. There is no cost for most higher education institutions to have one contact to receive an appropriate voice, text, and/or email messages from the Network. For school districts or higher education institutions to have more than one contact, a fee charge will apply. The Missouri School Boards' Association will have the responsibility for the collection of fee payments for additional contacts.

8. How will the Network distribute information if the Network is activated?

The Network will distribute a recorded voice, a text, and/or an email message to designated persons within minutes of activation. The message can be distributed to designated persons throughout all of Missouri or to designated persons in regions or specific counties of the state - as determined by particular circumstances. The Network

features tenured technology solutions currently utilized by commercial and other entities for broadcast alerts - alerts that can be sent in minutes to a few persons or thousands of persons.

9. Is the technology solution for the Network provided by the State of Missouri or the Missouri School Boards' Association?

The responsibility for the provision of a technology solution for the Network rests with the Missouri School Boards' Association. The Missouri School Boards' Association has made arrangements (by contract) with GroupCast, LLC, St. Louis, for the solution. GroupCast, LLC offers alert notification services to (individual) school districts and colleges and universities under the brand name "SchoolReach."

10. Does the technology solution for the Network have "built in" redundancy? Is the technology capable of transmitting a large number of alerts at one time?

As indicated, the Network is powered by the technology of GroupCast, LLC. Further, the Network benefits from the knowledge that GroupCast has acquired over the years from its experience in the provision of alert notification services to various entities

The GroupCast technology has "built in" redundancy with functionality from two different, secure sites. The capacity of the technology enables more than one-half million alerts to be transmitted within sixty minutes. The Network can be activated by a state official (who has authorized access) from any computer that has Internet connectivity or any touchtone telephone (including a mobile touchtone telephone). Accordingly, the Network could be activated from a "field based location."

11. What is the genesis for the provision of the Network?

The Missouri School Boards' Association has a rich history in the provision of information and services for safe and secure schools. The concept for the Network originated in discussions that first took place in February 2007 between representatives of Missouri Governor Matt Blunt, the Missouri Department of Public Safety and Office of Homeland Security, and the Missouri School Boards' Association. In April 2007, the Missouri Department of Public Safety and the Missouri School Boards' Association executed a Memorandum of Understanding that outlined the elements of the Network. As previously noted, the Network was extended to higher education institutions in the state in February 2008.

12. Is the Network tested on a regular basis?

Yes. The Network is tested on the second Wednesday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Test protocols for the Network are determined by the Missouri Department of Public Safety.

Brent Ghan, Chief Communications Officer
Missouri School Boards' Association
2100 I-70 Drive Southwest
Columbia, Missouri USA
Voice: 573.445.9920 x 415