

24/7 Support Gives City of Arlington, TX Peace of Mind

Irish Hancock, City of Arlington Office of Emergency Management

Arlington Texas, located within the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metropolitan area, is home to more than 350,000 residents. It's the 50th largest city in the United States, according to a 2007 U.S. Census Bureau and has an increasing rate of tourists, ranking it as one of the top three most visited cities in the U.S. One should expect these statistics considering that Arlington boasts a newly constructed stadium for the Dallas Cowboys (host of the 2011 Super Bowl) and Texas Rangers Ballpark. With this kind of growth, the city of Arlington knew they needed to upgrade their emergency operations center (EOC) which doubled as their cafeteria. The EOC was obsolete; the part-time EOC/part-time cafeteria was littered with old projectors with two ceiling mounted drop-down screens, two TVs, a DVD and VCR— not an ideal set up to maintain and increase situational awareness. What Arlington needed was a true command and control center that provided total situational awareness of the city's area for C2 decisions to improve public safety management and personnel response.



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A team lead by Irish Hancock had one clear goal in mind, to improve situational awareness in their control room by increasing communications and the sharing of information. The system would be the crux by which Arlington could increase response time to stay one step ahead of natural disasters, traffic incidents, and security issues, in an effort to better protect the city and its residents. And with Activu's collaborative capabilities they would be able to easily connect multiple work groups and remote sites over the network.

The Renovation

In 2007, the existing space was renovated, doubling its size to create a state-of-the-art, five thousand square foot Office of Emergency Management. The EOC (1500 square feet) is comprised of a 13'x5' video display wall and four LCD panels, powered by Activu software. At any given time, the system is monitoring six TV stations, DVD content, and up to thirty IP video cameras on the display wall. Additionally, they display a total of sixteen IP video cameras on the four LCD panels to monitor traffic patterns. The EOC is taking advantage of this increased situational awareness for police and fire officials responsible for monitoring and responding to traffic conditions, weather effects, and situations caused by conditions in and around the city's entertainment hubs.

The investment in a newly designed EOC proved invaluable in August of 2008 when Hurricane Gustav the Louisiana coast and again in September of 2008 when Hurricane Ike hit the Texas coast. Both hurricanes displaced thousands of residents, with the City of Arlington responsible for the shelter operation for the hundreds of evacuees seeking shelter within their jurisdiction. While monitoring the current situation the EOC had the ability to better prepare for the reception of evacuees displaced due to the two hurricanes. Consequently, the situational awareness the Activu system provided, allowed the Arlington Incident Commander and Emergency Management Staff to make better informed decision for repatriation of the evacuees to their home areas once the mandatory evacuations were lifted.

During the planning stages, the OEM team predicted they would occasionally be handling 24/7 emergencies. For this reason, 24/7 system support was a requirement from vendors bidding on their job. When support was necessary, they wanted instant service so that their responsiveness would not be compromised.

Improved Situational Awareness

What the city didn't realize was that their new system could provide increased situational awareness for multiple agencies within Arlington responsible for public safety. The functionality integrated into the new EOC would allow for these agencies to improve their response times and performance. "Because of our new system, we can do more things than we had ever done before and we're always finding new ways to use it" said Irish Hancock, Emergency Management Administrator, City of Arlington Office of Emergency Management. "Our police and fire reps are amazed by the technology which gives them access to multiple sources of information."

With direct access to Activu support staff, the city saw a clear value in contracting Activu to design and build their EOC. The city can quickly resolve issues with the same engineers that developed the software.

The city's popularity keeps the EOC very active. With events like Dallas Cowboy games, averaging 85,000 spectators, 2010 NBA All Stars Game, the 2011 Super Bowl, concert events and many more, Arlington is confident in its ability to protect the safety of its residents and visitors with a 13 ft wide view of "known conditions" with the ability to dynamically change, input and annotate screen content. What's more, Arlington's Traffic Management Center is running an identical Activu system which could be easily fully integrated with the EOC in the future. For now, the TMC works closely with the EOC to change street lights and redirect traffic when necessary. Together, they were able to manage the exit of 60,000 stadium attendees in less than an hour and twenty minutes using the Activu system.

"The best improvement that we have seen is the ability to bring together multiple sources of information and communication to improve our overall situational awareness." Irish Hancock, Emergency Management Administrator, City of Arlington Office of Emergency Management.

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Emergency Management in the City of Arlington: <http://www.ci.arlington.tx.us/fire/oem/index.html>

Activu Solutions: www.activu.com