

Guide to Inbound Emergency Alerting for Colleges & Universities

White Paper



At a Glance

- What is Inbound Emergency Alerting?
- How does it work?
- Why you should consider adding it to your campus security plan

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Personal Emergency Response

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Guide to Inbound Emergency Alerting for Colleges & Universities

The purpose of this short guide is to introduce college and university administrators and safety personnel to “inbound emergency alerting” and discuss how it fits into an overall campus security toolbox.

Technology advancements, especially the proliferation of smartphones, have dramatically increased the number of options available for student safety. Odds are, your campus has already implemented an outbound mass notification system for effectively contacting students and staff via text messaging in an emergency, but this is only the first step in using mobile phone technology to further enhance student security. Inbound emergency alerting allows you to use mobile and smartphone technology to enable students and staff in distress to directly and immediately alert campus security personnel. Inbound emergency alert messages go right to your security department and provide student/staff member name, phone number and their GPS location, enabling you to respond faster and more effectively. Inbound emergency alerting essentially turns your students’ and staff’s smartphones into personal “blue light” phones or “panic buttons” - without the maintenance costs and limitations of fixed systems.

What is Inbound Emergency Alerting?

Simply put, Inbound Emergency Alerting is a broad technique which allows students and staff members tap a single button on their smartphone when they are in trouble and accomplish two things: automatically dial an emergency phone number and automatically send crucial information to more than a single recipient. The button activates an immediate alert text and/or email message that is delivered directly to campus security personnel, without the delay of going through a remote mobile emergency call routing center. Alert messages include the student’s/staff member’s name, phone number and, perhaps most importantly, their location using GPS technology. First responders can use this information for immediate response and take advantage of other capabilities like auto call-back to contact the student or staff member in distress.



Figure 1 - Inbound Emergency Alerting Overview

Inbound emergency alerting apps can also include information on what to do in case of an emergency so students and staff members are better prepared to take the appropriate action. This information can include natural disaster information for emergencies like earthquakes and info on how to deal with urgent situations like an active shooter or possible alcohol poisoning.

Inbound Alerting systems can also improve your ability to prevent dangerous situations or keep them from escalating into true emergencies. Some examples of prevention-oriented capabilities include:

- direct phone access to the Resident Assistant on Duty, campus escorts or safe rides
- allowing students and staff members to quickly seek support from friends in non-emergency but urgent situations
- ability to report potentially dangerous situations to a “See Something, Say Something” program
- access to campus transit maps to help students safely get to where they need to go

How it Works

In this section we’ll look at Inbound Emergency Alerting capabilities in more depth. In the examples below, we discuss the DefenCall Campus solution.

Application Components

Inbound Emergency Alerting systems have two application components, a smartphone app that is used on the student’s or staff member’s phone and a cloud-based dashboard used by campus security personnel.

The value of GPS location in an emergency



The smartphone app is installed on the student’s or staff member’s smartphone and features a prominent “panic button” that the user can tap in case of emergency to immediately call the campus emergency number and send a text/email alert message to campus security. The application uses the Global Positioning System functionality available in all smartphones to be aware of the user’s location and send that location to first responders. The application is installed on the phone using a simple process whereby the user sends a text message and receives a return message with a link to register. Registration is completed through a short form on the smartphone that captures the student’s or staff member’s name, phone number and email. Having this information allows campus security personnel to know not only who is requesting help, but where they are and how to contact them when an alert is sent. The application also allows access to a range of additional communication functions and information as described below.

The dashboard for campus security personnel is a website where incoming alerts can be viewed and system preferences can be set. When an alert is initiated by a student or staff member, the dashboard displays a red-flashing alert screen and audible alert sound. Clicking on the screen displays the location of the alert along with the student name and phone number. First responders can be immediately dispatched to the scene of the alert.

Figure 2 - The Value of GPS

Alerting Functions

Inbound Emergency Alerting systems often offer escalating levels of protection:



Emergency Alert - This is the “panic button” prominently displayed on the main screen of the application. Tapping it sends an immediate emergency distress message directly to emergency responders, flashes a red screen on the monitoring dashboard and can dial the emergency number automatically. The distress message includes the student’s or staff member’s name, GPS location and phone number.



Buddy Text Alert - This message is initiated by tapping the triangular “caution” symbol icon and is sent to a user-configured list of contacts by text message. The message includes the user’s name, GPS location and phone number. These contacts can be friends, parents, colleagues or other people. This is intended for use in situations where the user wants help, but does not think the need the authorities, because it is not a true emergency.



“Just Check In” - This “piece of mind” function is initiated by tapping on the green “check” icon and sends a message indicating the user is “OK” to a pre-configured contact by text message or email. Check-in messages include the student or staff member’s name, GPS location and phone number. This function is especially useful for reassuring parents, friends or Resident Assistants that everything is alright, for example when the student has safely reached the dorm at night.

Button	Action	Info	Recipient
		 "Emergency"	 Authorities Administrators
Message Content: DEFENCALL EMERGENCY - "User" has an emergency here <link>. Phone: 14155551212			
		 "Help"	 Friends
Message Content: DEFENCALL - "User" is here <link>and needs your help. Phone: 14155551212			
		 "Checking in"	 Parents
Message Content: DEFENCALL - "User" is safely checking in from here <link>. Phone: 14155551212			

Figure 3 - Inbound Emergency Alerting Message Types

Communication Functions

Inbound Emergency Alerting applications can be configured to easily connect students and staff members to additional services that will increase their safety. One-button calling can be configured to services such as:

- Campus escorts to walk students home
- Safe Rides
- Direct connect to the Resident Assistant on duty
- “See Something, Say Something” program that makes students extra “eyes and ears” to improve campus safety.

“What to do in an Emergency” Information Access

Since Inbound Emergency Alerting systems are built around a smartphone application, they offer the ability to incorporate information that will be useful and, in some cases, potentially life-saving to students. Examples of information that can be included to improve student and community safety include:

- “What to do in an emergency” information for situations such as earthquake, fire, possible alcohol poisoning, active shooter on campus, assault prevention, theft prevention and other situations
- Campus transit maps and schedules
- Campus phone directory
- Other information that can be useful in increasing student safety

Benefits of Inbound Emergency Alerting

Inbound Emergency Alerting offers significant benefits including:

- Increase student and community safety by providing enhanced direct access to campus security personnel
- Calls go directly to campus security personnel, not a mobile 911 call routing center - vastly decreasing time from call to response
- Improved situational information to first responders through text/email messages showing who is requesting help and where they are
- Provide approved “what to do in an emergency” information that helps students and staff safely react to incidents
- Provide easy access to additional campus safety resources like escorts, Safe-Rides, transport maps and other programs
- Option to allow students and staff members to send crowd sourced “tips” of dangerous or illegal activity to campus security personnel turns students and staff into extra “eyes and ears”
- Much more cost effective and flexible than blue light phone systems or wired panic buttons
- Simple, turnkey deployment and administration
- Quick deployment - only days to customize and activate

Conclusion

Now more than ever, student safety is of paramount importance. But also now more than ever, technology provides college and university administrators and campus security personnel an expanded set of tools to engage and protect students and other community members more effectively. Inbound Emergency Alerting is one such tool that not only gives students an enhanced means of requesting emergency help, but also improves access to first responders and provides those responders with better information to act on when every second count.

For more information or to share your perspectives on Inbound Emergency Alerting, please feel free to contact us at info@defencall.com or +1 203-354-9164.

About DefenCall

Alert the Right People with the Right Info - Right Away. DefenCall increases the safety of students, employees, and other communities. At the tap of a button, the DefenCall mobile application speeds a direct alert to first responders and provides emergency preparation info. DefenCall offers solutions designed for colleges and universities, and health facilities.

DefenCall, Inc. is a technology platform and product company focused on improving the quality of urgent situation communications between community members and emergency responders. DefenCall Healthcare is a smartphone-based personal duress system for medical facilities and health systems. DefenCall Campus, is a mobile alerting system connecting students' smartphones directly to campus security departments. DefenCall K-12 is an alerting system which allows classroom teachers immediate emergency "panic button" access to administration and local police.

DefenCall's DM3™ platform is a flexible system that delivers urgent multi-mode communication to community groups and public safety organizations. Originally developed for sensor-based emergency alerting for networked radiation detectors, the DM3 platform has been enhanced and expanded to include mobile device support (HTML5 and native apps), geo-location, multiple communication options, and inputs for crowdsourced data. Key benefits of the system are its low cost, robust functionality and fast deployment capabilities.

For more information or to share your perspectives on smartphone personal duress apps, please feel free to contact DefenCall at info@defencall.com or +1 203-354-9164.

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