



Case Study



Growing Church Captures Lifelong Benefits of Fire Alarm and Voice Evacuation Upgrade

Seeking to accommodate its fast-growing membership, Russian Evangelical Baptist Church in Westfield, Mass., began planning an expansion in 2010 that would include a new 35,000-square-foot octagonal building, with worship facilities for 1,250 people on the main floor and a basement expansion of its school.

Much of the work on the new church expansion was completed by volunteers. Church members with expertise in various trades helped to build the facility, from the foundation to the roof. Alex Izoita, a licensed electrician and a deacon of the church, led a group of six electricians working on the project.

Izoita went to electrical wholesale distributor Graybar in West Springfield, Mass., to purchase fire protection equipment for the new church. He also needed help designing and commissioning the fire alarm system, so he turned to Scott Dana, a NICET IV commercial sales representative of Protection 1, a nationally-known fire and security services firm.

“Alex is a good electrician, but he realized he needed a strong partner to help create the system design,” said Dana.

“The partnership was perfect. He and I went over the plans, and we were able to collaborate to choose the best possible system for the church.”

The original plan was to expand an old, zoned fire alarm system that protected the older part of the church and school into the new building. However, in the end, the church opted for a new Fire-Lite Alarms addressable fire alarm system with emergency voice evacuation to protect the entire facility.

Fast-Growing Congregation

The Russian Evangelical Baptist Church serves a Russian immigrant community that sprang up around West Springfield, Mass., beginning in 1991. As Russia's borders opened up in the 1990s, the community grew rapidly. The new congregation first purchased land for a church location in 2001 and started work building a large worship facility. When the church opened its doors, it was already too small for its growing congregation. At that point, the congregation decided to combine the church and a school in a single location.

The fire alarm system centers around a Fire-Lite Alarms MS-9200UDLS addressable fire alarm control panel with a Fire-Lite Alarms Emergency Command Center (ECC) system providing voice evacuation functionality.



*Russian Evangelical Baptist Church
in Westfield, MA*



The addressable system pinpoints the location of the emergency, enabling fire fighters to respond faster. An annunciator located near the church main entrance offers fire officials easy access to nearly all system information and controls.

The system is composed of nearly 200 devices, including Fire-Lite Alarms smoke detectors, pull stations, duct smoke detectors, water flow switches, input and output modules, door holders, speakers, strobes, and elevator control relays. "I requested that the devices should be easy to program or to change-out if needed," said Izoita.

"As confusing and involved and intricate as this system is, the Fire-Lite way of doing it is the most straightforward, simple and direct way to get it done," said Dana.

Izoita and the other volunteer electricians installed all the devices, numbered them and provided a record to the Protection 1 technicians. The changeover to the new system happened overnight. The old system was shut down on a Friday night and the new system was up on Saturday morning.

"Alex bought the devices, and I provided support either on-site or remotely as the installation progressed," said Dana. "Then, our technicians connected the panels, programmed the system and tested it with the fire department."

Today, young families drive the growth of the school and church congregation, making it necessary to take possible future expansion into account when choosing a fire alarm solution. The MS-9200UDLS panel can support as many as 198 points, making it conducive to future building growth.

One system also helps to simplify monitoring the entire facility's fire protection. "The fire chief says it's better to have one integrated system," said Izoita. "We want to follow that model to provide the highest level of safety possible."

Emergency Voice Evacuation

Voice evacuation is a building code requirement based on the number of people in the building. Emergency communication is a critical life-saving tool to warn people of fire and other threats, particularly for places of assembly, like churches and schools. The fire alarm control panel communicates with the ECC system, so it "knows" where a fire is located in the building and can broadcast customized voice messaging based on that information. "It's easily done through the Fire-Lite software," said Dana.

The church facilities comprise an ECC-50/100 primary operator console, an ECC local operator console and an ECC remote microphone. Now, when first responders enter either building, they can pick up one of the ECC microphones and alert everyone on site, directing them to vacate the building, to stay seated, etc. A variety of audio zones have also been setup, allowing ECC users to send certain live and recorded messages to specific building areas.

When a fire is detected, the emergency voice system activates and broadcasts a pre-recorded message to the people in the building. Dana said the voice system, which directs people where to go in an emergency, is less likely to cause panic than just sounding a horn that could cause confusion.

At the same time, the Fire-Lite system turns up the house lighting (in case there

is an assembly in progress that uses stage lights), and shuts down the theatrical sound system to ensure all emergency messages are audible. In addition, it recalls elevators to the ground floor, shuts off fans and releases door holders to shut doors and isolate smoke.

The Fire-Lite system aligns with Protection 1's commitment to use only non-proprietary equipment in its systems. "It means we have to earn our customers' loyalty," said Dana. "We don't hold them hostage based on being locked into hardware. It's our policy, and it was a smart request by the church to use non-proprietary equipment."

Dana also noted cost was another advantage Fire-Lite offered this installation. Sold through authorized equipment distributors across the U.S., Fire-Lite parts are normally readily available and competitively priced.

In addition to designing and commissioning the system, Protection 1 will also provide annual inspections and testing, and maintain the system on an ongoing basis. "They were there anytime I had any questions or requests, and we look forward to continuing the relationship," said Izoita.

The fire system provides a high level of peace of mind to the church administrators and its constituents as it ensures the safety of the entire congregation.

"The fire alarm system is not like the lighting system, for example — you can't see what it does," said Izoita. "The fire alarm system is just quiet. I don't see it or hear it. But when there is an emergency, it comes into play and I know it will do the job. I have confidence everything, and everyone, will be safe."



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