



## Case Study



# Fire-Lite Alarms IP Communicator Graduates Georgia Schools to More Secure, Cost-Saving Fire Protection

Fire-Lite Alarms offers an IP (Internet Protocol) Communicator that has enabled Georgia's DeKalb County School District to avoid thousands of dollars in fire alarm transmission fees for its 144 buildings. As for the upgrade to utilizing its existing IP lines for fire alarm reporting, the school district surmised the cost to be half that of replacing its current radio system. An improvement in overall reliability was also obtained, with testing of communication lines to the central stations increasing from once a day to every 30 to 90 seconds.

Until recently, these 144 buildings in DeKalb County School District relied on a conventional, two-way, proprietary radio system for fire alarm communications.

Changes in radio frequency requirements implemented by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) led the district to seek out an alternative to replacing all radio transmitters.

DeKalb County School District buildings were covered by a myriad of conventional and addressable fire alarm systems from different manufacturers, many of varying ages. After researching a number of options, the district moved to communicating all fire alarm information over its existing fiber IP lines using Fire-Lite Alarms' Advanced IP Digital Alarm Communicator Transmitter, sometimes referred to as an "IP-DACT."

"We had fiber everywhere we needed it," said Chuck Hutcheson, systems manager in the infrastructure and security department at DeKalb County Schools. "The fiber has paid for itself many times over."

According to Hutcheson, the new IP fire alarm reporting system "cost about half as much as the school district would have to pay to upgrade its proprietary radio equipment."

The IP Communicator sends comprehensive contact-ID event information from any Honeywell-branded fire alarm control panel. It can also be easily configured for communication with any brand fire alarm control panel, which helped greatly in uniting the district's variety of systems. This simple device connects through the standard telephone ports on a fire alarm control panel's digital alarm communicator transmitter and requires little to no reconfiguration of the panel.

The schools' fire alarm reporting also received a boost in reliability with the IP Communicator's supervisory test of its connection with the central stations jumping from once a day to every 30 to 90 seconds. The device also secures all data using a 512-bit encryption.



*DeKalb County School District, Georgia*



“With that encryption level, you can’t spoof any IP devices out there without alarms going off,” said Hutcheson. “There’s no way anyone could break into the data packets and understand what they were.”

Making further use of its existing IP infrastructure, the school district upgraded its security system to communicate alarms over IP using the mIP-2/UD Communicator from Honeywell Power. Comparable to the fire alarm IP Communicator, the mIP-2UD device works with any security alarm panel that outputs Contact ID alarm protocol.

The IP Communicator is capable of reporting all 144 DeKalb School facilities’ fire alarm signals to three different receivers. All systems signals are sent to the local public safety department’s central station, as well as a central station operated by Atlanta-based Ackerman Security Systems. All trouble signals, indicating service is needed on a system, are sent to a maintenance receiver,

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*- Chuck Hutcheson  
Systems Manager  
DeKalb County Schools*

allowing facilities personnel to quickly address them.

The majority of locations with the oldest fire protection were upgraded with new MS-9600UDLS fire alarm systems from Fire-Lite Alarms. DeKalb County Schools managed the commissioning of new systems, enlisting contractors for the installation of the equipment while school district staff handled programming. Staff members were already familiar with IP networking and learned fire alarm system specifics by attending several three-day Fire-Lite Alarms trainings. These hands-

on trainings are conducted across the United States throughout the year.

The entire installation process took nearly a year to reach all of the buildings involved. According to Hutcheson, the biggest challenge was educating some contractors about IP networking technologies for fire alarm communications, as some were not aware of those options.

The school district plans to build approximately one new school per year over the next five years and has a new high school in progress that will support high-achieving magnet programs. Hutcheson anticipates the high school and other new schools will be added to DeKalb County Schools’ IP-based fire alarm reporting system.

“We want it to be the most tech-savvy high school in Georgia,” said Hutcheson.



*Chuck Hutcheson, Systems Manager in the Infrastructure & Security Department at DeKalb County Schools*



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