

A cry for help from the classroom

Device allows teachers to summon emergency assistance

The first 30 seconds of an emergency classroom situation are the most important in determining a positive outcome, according to Marina Willis, president of the Pin-Point and Sensatec business units at RF Technologies.



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A new safety device developed by the Brookfield-based company gives teachers facing emergency situations an outlet to make the most of those 30 seconds.

The device, known as the HelpAlert RTLS pendant, is “a way for teachers to be able to communicate when they’re under some type of duress” without alerting their entire classroom or a perpetrator, Willis said.



Willis

RF Technologies, which has 155 employees across the country, works in the “life safety business,” according to chief executive officer Glenn Jonas. Since its inception in 1987, the company has evolved to serve the education industry, particularly as several mass shootings have impacted schools across the country.



Jonas

With the push of a button on HelpAlert, teachers can communicate to a school staff member that they’re in need

of critical help, whether they’re confronted by a school shooter, an unruly student or a medical emergency. The button sits on a pendant that can either be mounted in an obscure classroom location, such as under a teacher’s desk, or kept right with the teacher at his side or in his pocket.

The pendant also contains an LED light that regularly flashes green every 10 seconds. When a teacher presses the button, the light changes to a solid red. The pendant then sends an alert over the school’s server to the system software and sets off an alarm in the vicinity the school has designated for monitoring the HelpAlert technology. The innovation uses a school’s existing Wi-Fi infrastructure in relaying information to the server.

The pendants hold two different alarm sets that specify the severity of individual situations. For milder incidents, a teacher can quickly hit the button on the pendant to reach out for help. For more serious events, a teacher can press and hold the button to activate an alarm that indicates the need for help is dire.

The staffer in charge of the emergency technology can also vet alarms from teachers on an iPad or through a smartphone. Once the staff member picks up on the alarm, he or she uses HelpAlert software to acknowledge that the emergency has been noted and help is being summoned. The acknowledgment cues



The HelpAlert device can fit inside a pocket or clip to a teacher’s side so he or she can call for help quickly and quietly.

RF Technologies

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Innovation:

HelpAlert RTLS pendant

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the LED light on the pendant to glow green, signaling to the teacher that his or her plea for help has been answered.

Through HelpAlert’s software, school personnel can identify the specific location of the pendant, as well as track its movement in order to stay on top of a teacher’s location at all times during an emergency. The technology relies on access points within a school’s Wi-Fi system to pinpoint teacher location. The technology also incorporates reference tags – small transmitter boxes – that act as second data points and lead to better

location results.

Upon implementing HelpAlert technology into a school, RF Technologies uploads the school building's floor plans into the software – floor plans of individual classrooms, wings or departments, depending on each school's preferences and needs.

Once a dangerous situation has been resolved, the staff member overseeing the HelpAlert technology clears the software of the alert.

Data related to classroom disruptions – such as types, times and locations of incidents – is maintained in the software for school officials to review. That way, they can pick up where and when incidents are most often occurring.

“It helps them analyze what they need to be thinking about and where they need to deploy resources,” Jonas said.

The security system also monitors the battery levels of each pendant and routinely ensures that each pendant is functioning correctly. All the teacher must do is carry the pendant with her.

In addition to aiding classrooms in distress, HelpAlert has been used in hospitals and in the hospitality industry. Looking ahead, RF Technologies is exploring implementing the technology into corporate offices that may feel threatened by disgruntled ex-employees, according to Jonas.

With shootings at schools and in public settings on the rise, HelpAlert is critical to protecting student lives, deterring future tragedies and reinforcing teachers' “peace of mind,” Willis said.

“It's sad that we've gotten to the phase that we need a system like this, but it's a necessity,” she said. “It's a requirement.” ■