

Using two-way radios for school lockdown procedures

When it comes to protecting students and staff during an on-site emergency, having a detailed school lockdown procedure is key.

Though not legally required, most schools have lockdown procedures in place – but to ensure these procedures are carried out quickly and effectively, staff need to be able to communicate in real time.

Government advice in these scenarios is to use “existing internal messaging systems” – such as mobile and email – but while both of these options are readily available, they are not reliable, instant or secure.

Communication has a direct impact on how well a school lockdown procedure is carried out – and with mobile and email being reliant on often uncertain variables, [schools need a more robust end-to-end solution](#).

In this blog, we'll outline how two-way radios can help schools to enhance communications during school lockdown procedures and help keep staff and students safe.

Reliable and instant communication

It's important to remember that mobile networks are a shared resource. Phone masts are only designed to handle a certain number of connections, so if the number of active connections exceeds the mast's capacity, some calls may be dropped or fail to connect, and signal quality will suffer.

As a result, signal coverage can often fluctuate. During peak times especially, it can be difficult to reliably connect, send or receive calls and/or texts. In rural areas, the issue is often the lack of coverage.

The other problem is that mobile phone communication isn't instant. Calls need to be dialled out and are only established **once the receiver picks up** – and calls can only be made one at a time.

The same applies to emails sent from mobile phones. For emails to be sent and received, mobile phones need 4G or Wi-Fi connectivity. The former is also dependent on signal coverage. If too many people are being served by one mast and using 4G, the quality of the connection will suffer. Emails will be queued and sent once the connection is restored but not before – so relying on 4G to send emails in a school lockdown situation simply isn't viable.

Using two-way radios, however, all of the above can be avoided. With two-way radios, school staff can communicate in real-time and school-wide. Transmissions are instant – users just need to press the transmit or push-to-talk button to be able to communicate with everyone currently on the frequency (channel) – and there's no limit to the number users that can be active on a frequency, allowing school staff to scale communications across the entire site.

Communicate with the right people

Another issue with using mobile phones and email during school lockdown procedures is that they make it difficult to communicate with the right people in real-time.

If a staff member needs to communicate with several staff members in an emergency, using a mobile phone or sending an email takes far too long. They could issue a general announcement over the school's public announcement system, but the information might be sensitive or specific to certain individuals, so security is also an issue which needs to be considered. That information might be on a need-to-know basis or if publicly stated, could cause panic or confusion.

Two-way radios for schools solve the problem by allowing users to set up and use specific frequencies (channels) and communicate with those on that frequency. This is particularly useful on large school sites with multiple buildings or when staff members only need to communicate with heads of year groups, school nurses or caretakers, for example.

For a more comprehensive communication strategy at larger schools, multiple two-way radio systems and networks could be set up across the school site to allow for segmented **and** universal communication.

By using two-way radios for schools, communication can be streamlined, safety improved and updates provided in real-time, wherever, whenever.

In addition, communications can also be encrypted with high-end radios. Encryption and decryption codes can be used during the transmission and receipt of data to ensure that if communications are intercepted, they are garbled and almost impossible to understand.

Built-for-purpose, lightweight and discreet

Unlike mobile phones which provide multiple functions well, two-way radios are designed to excel at communication.

Two-way radios include essential features to ensure staff and student health and safety. GPS, for instance, allows staff to keep track of colleagues who are outside, so if an accident occurs outside, staff can quickly respond. It's also useful for when staff are outside directing groups of students as part of safety procedures. As staff members will be with their assigned student group(s) at all times, GPS tracking will enable other members of staff to locate them – and in turn students – with ease.

[Lone worker is another beneficial feature](#). It allows supervisors to check on the status of radio users at selected time intervals. At set periods the radio will beep and the user will have to press the push-to-talk button to confirm that he or she is available and safe. If the user fails to perform this task, the radio will go into alert mode and send an alarm to the site manager, control room or anyone who has the ability to monitor the status of workers on site.

This feature is really useful for staff members investigating or positioned in remote areas of the site during the school lockdown procedure. Caretakers, for example, might be checking entry and exit points to the school, whereas staff members might be scattered across the site itself to ensure all students are accounted for.

In addition to providing features to enhance user health and safety, many two-way radios are lightweight and discreet. This is important as during school lockdown procedures staff members will be constantly on the move, ensuring processes are followed and students are safe and secure. Staff need to be flexible and responsive – and carrying a large or heavy radio would cause unnecessary delays. Two-way radios can also be paired with Bluetooth accessories (such as earpieces) to allow hands-free communication.

A good example is the [Motorola Solutions EVX-261 portable digital two-way radio](#). It's lightweight, discreet, budget-friendly and capable of operating in both analogue and digital modes (making it ideal for mixed communications). It's also equipped with lone worker and emergency alerts. All of these features make it an ideal two-way radio for schools.

At 2CL Communications, we specialise in the provision, implementation and development of two-way radio solutions. We provide bespoke radio system design and installation, two-way radio maintenance, licence applications and much, much more.

If you're looking to improve your school's communication infrastructure to streamline lockdown procedures, enhance health and safety and protect staff and students, [we can tailor a solution to fit your needs](#).

Get in touch on 02380648500 or email contact@2cl.co.uk.