

# **SYSCO FOODS UNLOCK THE POWER OF THE CENTURION ELITE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PLATFORM**



## **FRESH SOLUTIONS FOR FROZEN SAFETY**

CINCINNATI, OH—April 2022—An integral part of the local community, the Sysco Central Illinois Distribution facility in Lincoln, IL, delivers high quality food service and products to suppliers and customers—from restaurants and schools

to hotels and healthcare facilities. For Tim Clifton, Director of Safety, protecting this 40-acre facility and, most importantly, the people it employs, is critical to delivering Sysco's trusted services.

The Sysco facility is open around the clock, seven days a week and employs 170 individuals from the surrounding community. Like most large cold storage facilities, Sysco uses ammonia as a refrigerant. It was a desire to better protect against potential ammonia leaks that initially prompted Clifton to partner with Response Technologies, a company known for emergency notification systems and the world's fastest emergency notification platform, a leader in two-way communication and security technology solutions.

After learning about the technology options available through Response Technologies, the Sysco project quickly grew into a comprehensive, integrated emergency notification and critical incident system that not only monitors ammonia levels, but also integrates fire, weather and gunshot protection. It's a solution that sets the Central Illinois facility apart, even from other Sysco operating companies.

## **The Situation**

The 40-acre Sysco Central Illinois building includes a dry warehouse with loading docks on one side, a refrigerated warehouse on the other and operations in the center. In addition to general meeting areas and offices on a second floor, the building includes a test kitchen with two full-time chefs, truck maintenance shops and additional refrigerated space.

Sysco's previous alarm system was outdated. "Everything was antiquated and most of our alerting was done with manual air horns," Clifton explained. "Our evacuation team consisted of 30 individuals and each team member had an assigned area to sweep—from warehouse to cubicles to restrooms—to ensure employees knew what was going on." Now a team of only six is needed to manage an alert situation.

"On the freezer side of the building, we have millions and millions of dollars' worth of perishable food," said Clifton. Protecting this investment was a definite need for the facility. In addition to business assets, protecting the people was the highest priority.

## **Challenges to Overcome**

Several areas of the Sysco building presented unique challenges in designing an effective, comprehensive system.

Sysco's control room with ammonia storage was a top concern. Ammonia, typically used for cold food storage, can be deadly if leaked. "The alert system for the ammonia was a unique need. We have three vessels holding approximately 15,000 pounds of ammonia on site," Clifton said. "While we have all of the safeguards, it was critical to make sure there were reliable controls and measures in place, in case something went wrong." The previous system did not allow immediate, direct communication to anyone in the area in case of an emergency.

"Another big challenge was getting an emergency signal into the freezer," Clifton continued. "We have big blowers back there and all kinds of noise so we needed a solution that could ensure anyone in the freezer could still hear the alarm, alerts or the address system."

The truck shop was also an area of concern. "There are a lot of chemicals and trucks are being worked on. A lot of things could go wrong out there," said Clifton. Many areas, such as the engine room and main shop, had extensive machinery and ammonia piping that presented additional challenges for receiving network signals.

## **The Process**

Clifton, who has been leading safety at Sysco for more than 25 years, began the process of updating the emergency system by involving local officials. "We initially started with the local emergency planning committee (LEPC), police and rescue. We wanted to include these local services because we are one of the larger employers in the city and we are heavily involved in the community."

Clifton spent more than a year searching for the right partner to help develop an emergency system. While he met with many organizations, the Response Technologies team stood apart. "They had great ideas," he shared. "Most importantly, I could tell they truly cared. That was the difference for me."

"We were concerned about how we would get service to the many areas of the building that had interference," Clifton added. "The Response Technologies team clearly explained our options for sending signals and ensuring service throughout the entire 40-acre property. They really worked with us, and we couldn't have done it without them."

After site visits, the Response Technologies team presented the plan to Clifton and the Sysco operations company officials. "It was very detailed and was really a 'no brainer, seriously,'" Clifton explained. The plan came right before numerous COVID-19 shutdowns but, despite reducing expenses, officials at Sysco's

corporate headquarters recognized the importance of the system, and it was one of few capital expenses approved to move forward at the time.

“You have to have an emergency program that’s up to date,” Clifton said. “This vision for safety is part of the Sysco culture.”

What began as a basic ammonia alert system grew into a robust emergency system protecting all parts of the facility including gas leaks with fire, weather and even gunshot detection.

### **Immense Facility, Integrated Solution**

Response Technologies developed a custom emergency notification system that not only encompassed the expansive building, but also extended to difficult-to-reach areas such as deep freezers and noisy locations near fans or machinery. The system offers alerts that can be heard and/or seen, according to Matt Volkerding, Vice President of Sales for Response Technologies.

The integrated emergency system is powered by Response Technologies’ award-winning Centurion Elite® platform, designed to support environmental sensing, facility monitoring, panic and gunshot detection as well as fire and weather alerts all in one solution. Regarded as the fastest emergency notification system on the market, Centurion Elite® has the capability to send notifications within two seconds to multiple groups—from emergency dispatch to employees—simultaneously. In addition, the modular system can expand as Sysco’s needs change.

“Response Technologies offered one of the only systems that could go immediately to radio as well as the PA system,” Koorsen said. “Everyone could receive alerts simultaneously using different methods—text, computer, radio, PA—that was exactly what Sysco needed.”

This integrated response system includes:

- **Ammonia gas leak detection**—The need for ammonia sensing and alert still drives the system. If a leak is detected, employees are immediately notified through email, text messaging, radio and the facility’s public address (PA) system. While the system is currently manual, Clifton is working on upgrading the ammonia sensor to enable automated alerts.
- **Four-function Panic Button**—A four-function panic button can notify employees and responders of the emergency instantly—using text, email, two-way radio and the facility’s PA system. There is a dedicated button for

an ammonia leak, one for fire, one for weather and a fourth that indicates “all-clear.”

- **Fire Alarm**—System includes a fire response that is automatic if the fire panel is tripped. The alarm can also be manually activated.
- **Weather Alert**—Weather events are a concern for facilities throughout the country. Sysco is able to communicate severe weather events to employees, helping to keep them safe and informed. This alert can be triggered manually, or it can be connected to a weather radio for an automated system.
- **Gunshot Detection**—System includes Gunshot Detection with multiple wireless, network-based sensors throughout the facility. Gunshot Detection automatically sends a notification within two seconds after using two-factor authentication to prevent false alarms. It tells responders specifically where the incident occurred to save response time. The system does not rely on human intervention to determine if a firearm has been fired.
- **PCAlert®** works with Sysco’s existing network and officials can tailor specifically who is notified depending on the type of emergency, such as a gas leak, weather event, fire or gunshot detection.

## Results

“With the new integrated emergency response system, there’s nowhere in these 40 acres that you would not [receive] these [alerts or hear the address system],” Clifton said. “We wanted a system that we could expand upon.”

While the system currently is manually controlled, equipment continues to be updated in the Lincoln community. “Our hope in the near future [is so we] can press a button and have a direct line to dispatch. It’s not there yet but that’s what we are working toward.”

“We are very happy with Response Technologies,” Clifton said, adding that with the new system, the facility’s evacuation team was able to move from 30 people to six. “That was an amazing accomplishment in itself!”

“When we partner on a system, I want to make sure everything is done correctly,” said Koorsen. “I want to put in a system and not have to worry about it in the future. With Response Technologies I knew it was covered,” he said, adding that they’ve experienced zero issues with the Sysco system.

“I absolutely recommend Response Technologies,” stated Clifton. He and Response Technologies have demonstrated the system to other Sysco distribution facilities and plan to do more.

“We are proud of the value and safety this system brings to Sysco,” Clifton said.



Capitol Electronics is a proud certified reseller/partner of Response Technologies.

For facility assessment and system design, call or email us today!

317.839.5022

[sales@capitolelectronics.com](mailto:sales@capitolelectronics.com)