

Rancho Santiago Community College District Switches to Rave Alert™ for Faster Notifications During Campus-Wide Disasters



HIGHER EDUCATION

Rave Alert™

40,000 contacts,
including students,
faculty, staff, construction
workers and others in
Rave Alert

10 text and email
messages were
sent out during the
Canyon 2 Fire, **totaling**
approximately 32,700

In 2016, Antoinette “Toni” Bland, chief, district safety and security at Rancho Santiago Community College District (RSCCD) started to test out the district’s notification system and prep for the Great ShakeOut Earthquake Drill. The drill is held every year throughout the country, so people practice earthquake preparedness safety in their region and know how to prepare, respond and recover in the event of a disaster.

“I wanted to send out an alert and our options were email, text and phone,” Bland said. “When I wanted to use it after getting logged on, I literally had to do 10 clicks to get a message sent out and about another six clicks to get a phone message out.”

“My feeling is this is a drill and I have plenty of time to click away to do this post,” she continued. “But in an actual emergency, I need something that can go out rapidly. If I need to do it with one hand, I want to be able to do it with one hand.”

Bland sent out a test message about “Drop, Cover, and Hold On,” the appropriate action to take to reduce injury and death during earthquakes, and she used the college’s previous emergency notification system. “It took about 5 minutes and you only have seconds to send out an alert” when an earthquake occurs, she added.

RELIABLE ALERTS ON THE GO

RSCCD is based in California's Orange County and consists of two community colleges, Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College. The district office and other facilities include education centers, a fire training center and the Orange County Sheriff's Regional Training Academy. The district encompasses 24 percent of Orange County, from Santa Ana and Anaheim Hills to parts of Irvine and Anaheim.

When it was time to find a new vendor for RSCCD's emergency notification system, Bland and the district was focused on ease of use, effectiveness and reliability. The new system needed to be mobile, rather than desktop only.

"I wanted it to be easy to use, but I also wanted it to reach the intended recipients," she said. "We have a large district and it's spread over different cities. We have two main campuses and seven centers, including a middle college with teenagers, and five child development centers, as well as centers for veterans. I wanted all those individuals to be reached and I wanted it done in a timely manner."

Messages in the previous emergency notification system were getting throttled, so they wouldn't be delivered to recipients, resulting in many message kickbacks.

Bland was looking for an emergency notification system that could handle about 40,000 users, including students, employees, staff, visitors, vendors, contractors and even parents whose children attend the child development center. RSCCD checked out multiple vendors and after speaking to numerous peers, Bland and the district chose Rave Alert as its emergency notification system.

RSCCD's IT department had concerns about implementing a new system into its current environment, especially when it came to switching vendors and uploading data. After working with Rave and undergoing training on Rave Alert, all of their concerns were settled.

"It was simple and took a short period of time," Bland said. "They worked through any concerns and it was over and done in an hour. It was a 'Wow.'"



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DIRE NOTIFICATION

The district implemented Rave Alert early 2017, testing it out every quarter. RSCCD was ready when the Canyon 2 Fire broke out in the Anaheim Hills area of Anaheim that fall. The brush fire quickly spread, eventually burning 9,217 acres in the region.

The fire burned right to the edges of the Santiago Canyon College campus, jumping the campus and entering into the nearby community. As the fire evolved, the local fire and police departments were stretched thin dealing with the local entities that burned, and RSCCD's Security and Public Safety Department handled its own evacuation and street control around campus.

"Myself and my lieutenant weren't in the office. We had brush burning and we had to do an evacuation; it was really bad," Bland said. "When we decided to evacuate, and we had to send out a notification, we just used our cell phones to send an alert while we're putting out small brush fires near the edge of campus. This is why I'm such a fan of Rave. We just used our cell phone and sent messages out in rapid succession. We evacuated our campus in a short period of time because we had Rave Alert."

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Bland said the previous emergency notification system would have required someone to go the office and log on to a computer to send out notifications. "You couldn't see on campus because of the smoke and flames," she said. "Brush was burning outside of our campus."

As the fire started, four messages were sent out to the Santiago Canyon College community over



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text and email that day alone. The initial alert announced the campus was closing and evacuating, with subsequent messages announcing which roads were closed so the remaining students and staff knew how to leave. Another message was later sent out to the Santa Ana College community to evacuate when smoke built up there. Messages were later sent out the following morning and evening announcing both campuses were closed, and other messages were sent out informing classes were back on.

"We were able to mobilize so quickly that people weren't panicked because they knew what was happening and we got our campus evacuated," Bland said. "It was easy-peasy. That's what I wanted. During an emergency you have enough to worry about; you also don't want to worry about emergency notifications."

AN INVALUABLE SAFETY LAYER

After the Canyon 2 Fire, an after-action report was made and one area that needed to be addressed was including contractors, parents of children in the child development center, and others in Rave Alert. For example, contractors weren't initially alerted to the evacuation plan when the fire first started.

A photograph of the Rancho Santiago Community College District building, a large modern structure with many windows and columns. The name "RANCHO SANTIAGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT" is visible on the top right of the building. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

CASE STUDY | Rancho Santiago Community College District

As a result, RSCCD implemented Rave Alert's SMS Opt-In feature, allowing the Santa Ana police department, Santa Ana Unified School District police, parents, construction workers, vendors, attendees at special events and others to opt into the Rave mass notification system temporarily by texting a keyword to a short code. When an event occurs, they'll receive messages and information about particular situations. SMS Opt-In can automatically expire on a specific date or after a certain amount of time has expired.

"Whenever we send out an alert, we just check the box," Bland said. "You don't have to do a lot of work to include the opt-in folks. That's the beauty of Rave. During an emergency, there's a little bit of chaos going on and little bit of stress, you don't want to have to think too hard because you have competing interests in your mind."

RSCCD has since used Rave Alert to inform its community about when a power outage and a large water leak occurred. After some initial education about Rave Alert, Bland said the district community expects their alerts.

"Everyone is tuned into it and they expect the messages," she said. "They want that information and that's really great."

"Rave Alert helps keep people safe," Bland added. "We're one of the largest districts in California and for us to have a way to send information quickly and easily to all of our 40,000 stakeholders is something that's invaluable."

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