

Listen Close: SyREN is Coming to JSC

If you haven't already heard, Johnson Space Center recently purchased a new mass notification and alert system. The Systematic Recall and Emergency Notification (SyREN) system will provide rapid access to information when the center is faced with a critical emergency.



Beginning mid-May, SyREN will be deployed and installed to all PC workstations and laptops across the center. Once installed, employees will notice a purple icon that will appear in the Windows system tray at the bottom right corner of the desktop screen. At the end of this month, every employee that logs into their JSC Domain will be notified by SyREN through an administrative pop-up to provide voluntary contact

information. This includes cell phone numbers, home phone numbers, personal e-mail accounts, etc. While people may be apprehensive about providing their personal information, it is vital to have in case of emergency. This contact information is protected, secured in a database, not available to any third party, and never used except for the explicit purpose to reach the intended party in an emergency situation. Why the change? The JSC Emergency Notification System (JENS) was found to be limited to only e-mail notification and a posting to the JSC internal homepage. It was time to upgrade to greater capabilities.

"Things change over time," said Alan Mather, Chief, Protective Services Division. "We face emerging physical and cyber threats from ever-evolving sources, and based upon the type of threat and situation, the responses are different. There is a definite need to take advantage of new and existing technology to communicate quickly with JSC employees to effectively protect people and property. Phone trees and e-mail work but may not be appropriate for serious situations, in which rapid and timely communication must be immediate to alert employees and convey information and instructions, such as evacuate or shelter-in-place."

Late last year, an IRD & COD team conducted a detailed market research in which several vendors of real-time communications and alerting platforms, including providers of enterprise instant messaging, were thoroughly evaluated. AtHoc, Inc. gained the highest scores for product maturity, enterprise-class features, ease of use and fastest deployment time.

In a partnership with the Information Resources and Center Operations Directorates, JSC decided to improve its emergency notification system to one that would disseminate information to employees faster and through additional communication channels. Late last year, an IRD & COD team conducted a detailed market research in which several vendors of real-time communications and alerting platforms, including providers of enterprise instant messaging, were thoroughly evaluated. AtHoc, Inc. gained the highest scores for product maturity, enterprise-class features, ease of use and fastest deployment time.

AtHoc, Inc. is recognized for providing enterprise-class, network-centric emergency notification systems to military, government and commercial organizations for physical security, force protection and personnel accountability. Since 1999, AtHoc has focused entirely on providing top-notch emergency notification systems to companies across the country. They are the leading provider to the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, University of California (UCLA), Hawaii and the American Red Cross.

Using the latest in today's technology, our new sophisticated emergency system will be able to transform JSC's IP network and all its connected devices, wired and wireless, into an alarm system in times of an emergency. From one console in the Emergency Operations Center, SyREN will launch the alert message across many communication channels simultaneously to inform employees of an impending emergency. When this happens, all PCs and laptops become alarms to alert employees. It will attempt to reach those who are not

near a computer by using previously provided contact information, such as cell phones, PDAs, BlackBerries, personal e-mail accounts and home phones.

"We want to reach people with alert, protection, or action information about an emergency situation," said Mather. "If a person leaves their office, communication to their desktop computer or office telephone is ineffective. Through SyREN, we will also be able to notify employees through cell phone, BlackBerry or home phone, if the additional information is provided."

"On average, this emergency notification system can reach all employees in any location within two minutes via desktop, and can support many tens of thousands geographically-dispersed [employees] through a wide range of communication channels," said AtHoc Vice President of Marketing Simon Berman.

After SyREN is deployed and running, a monthly test will make sure the system is working properly. These tests are scheduled to run the first Thursday of every month. Though employees are asked to provide the additional contact information, they will not receive any test alerts to their cell phones, BlackBerries, e-mail accounts, etc. During these tests, employees who log into their JSC Domain will receive a pop-up on their desktop indicating that SyREN is conducting its monthly test though no response will be required from the user. The first monthly test is scheduled for June 5.

For more information regarding SyREN, contact Matt Soltis in the Office of Emergency Management at 281-483-8607.

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