



# LOCKDOWN



## The Background

As part of the **Ofsted inspection**, schools will be asked if they have a **Lockdown Policy**. This can be a simple document with guidelines. At present, schools do not need to have a Lockdown system in place. However, Ofsted now advocate a dedicated lockdown alarm to be in place, distinctive to the sound of the fire alarm. This is in line with advice from **NACTSO** (National Counter Terrorism Security Office) which states that the **'use of fire alarms should be avoided to reduce incorrect response to an incident'**. The **ALERTEX Lockdown System** has been developed as a simple, rapidly deployable range of call and alert points aimed at supporting schools with their site security requirements.

## The System Explained

The **ALERTEX Lockdown System** comprises **battery operated units** which can be quickly installed on the school site over a weekend or even at the end of the school day; thus, minimising disruption to the learning environment. The battery life is around **three years**.

A maximum of **64 units** can be installed per site, with **16 mesh hops up to 1km apart**. When one ALERTEX unit is activated, it will trigger all units in range to sound an **audible alert or lockdown message**, accompanied by a **flashing beacon light**.

**ALERTEX** units can sound a variety of alerts to differentiate them from a fire alarm. There are **32 sounds to choose from** alternatively, an **annunciator variant** can be ordered which has a built-in strobe.

There is a **standard lockdown message** or the school may wish to **record their own message**. In some cases, the school may wish to **play a music clip** which pupils recognise as a danger and must make their way to their nearest classroom.

**ALERTEX** call points and sounder / beacons are available as **both internal and external (weatherproof) variants**. Sages are also available for external units which may be prone to objects hitting them and causing a false alarm: i.e. footballs.

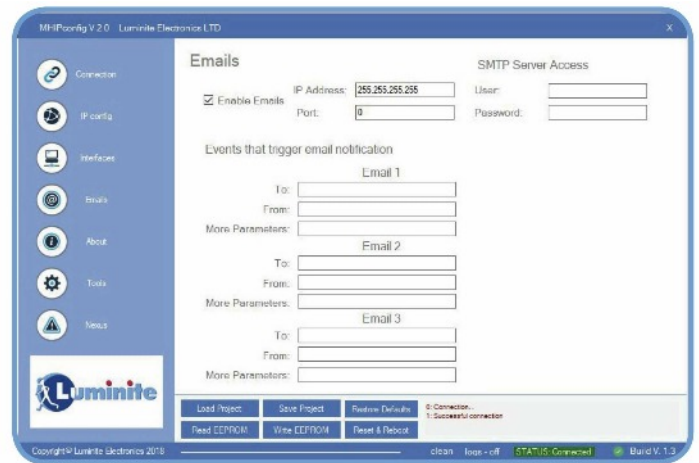
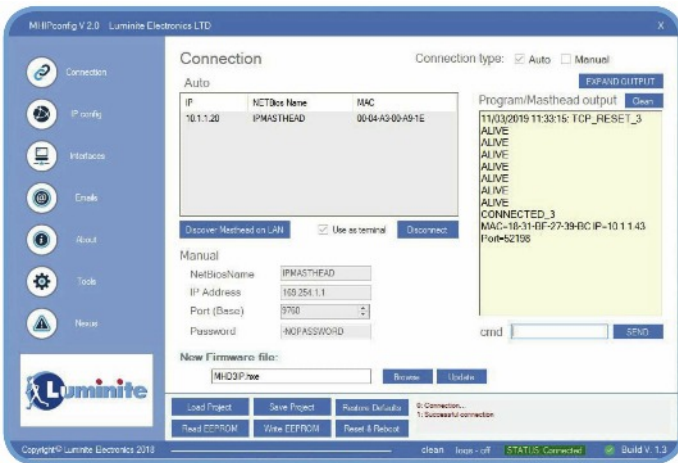




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## The PC App

The PC app also allows one central location (normally the school office) to monitor and control activated units. From here, the user can **reset the system after activation**, although the originally activated call point will have to be manually reset. A **silent test** can be made via the PC app or a short / longer test if needed. We would advise that the system is **tested weekly in line with fire alarm procedures**.



The Lockdown System may be activated in response to any number or situations. A major fire in the vicinity of the school will not be as grave as an intruder spotted on the school premises with a potential weapon. This is where the **ALERTEX PC app email function** can be utilised to its fullest. The app allows for **3 email addresses to be notified** in the event of activation. The school can attach an **email group**, for example email addresses of the teaching staff, to further clarify the severity of the event.

A lesser event may, for example, entail pupils being allowed free movement within the school but not outside. The school lockdown policy should be able to demonstrate an understanding of a proportionate response to these different situations and the unique **ALERTEX PC app** allows for that.





WHAT LOCKDOWN SOLUTIONS ARE THERE ON THE MARKET AND HOW DOES A SCHOOL CHOOSE WHICH IS BEST FOR THEM?



## INTRODUCTION

As part of the Ofsted inspection, schools will be asked if they have a Lockdown Policy – this can be a simple document with guidelines – up until recently they have not had to have an actual Lockdown system installed. However, Ofsted now advocate a dedicated lockdown alarm to be in place, distinctive to the sound of the fire alarm. This is in line with advice from NACTSO (National Counter Terrorism Security Office) which states that the ‘use of fire alarms should be avoided to reduce incorrect response to an incident’.

Whilst Ofsted inspectors are primarily concerned with the performance of the school with regards to learning, they will refer to site security and will want the school to demonstrate that they are at the very least meeting basic criteria to protect pupils, staff and the premises. Their latest framework document points to ‘the effectiveness of health and safety policies and procedures, including conducting necessary risk assessments as well as regular checks on equipment and premises and the effectiveness of arrangements to provide a safe environment and secure school site’. A poor showing with regards to the safety of pupils in the case of emergency will impact an Ofsted inspection negatively, therefore schools are looking to implement lockdown systems in accordance with their policy, but which one best suits a school’s needs?

Choosing a lockdown system is fraught with pitfalls and there is very little guidance from local councils and central government. The NASUWT has recently called on the government to provide schools with a coherent lockdown procedure which is recognised nationally. Chris Keates, NASUWT General Secretary said ‘responsibility for ensuring security and terrorism preparedness should be the responsibility of the whole governing body. It would not be appropriate for the government simply to require schools to have preparedness plans in place and assume they are able to do this’.

When researching a lockdown system, schools will normally start with an online search. There is an array of solutions out there, some expensive, requiring cabling and some invasive in other ways – requiring access to the schools Wi-Fi network, for example, which may not be possible or appropriate. Most schools will know where their problem hot spots are for confrontations etc and will be looking to install an easy to use system when a lockdown is required. However, the school should prepare for the unexpected and ensure that the system they use is fit for purpose. In this paper we will look at what alternatives there are out there and what schools should consider when choosing their lockdown system.

## WHY WOULD A LOCKDOWN SYSTEM BE USED?

Firstly, what incidents may instigate a lockdown? There can be a number of scenarios leading to a school requiring pupils and staff to make themselves safe within the school premises. Many schools suffer from postcode wars where pupils may be part of gangs and the end of school day is often a flash point for troubles from nearby schools.



An intruder on site with a weapon is an obvious concern for schools or an argument between parents may escalate. A rogue animal in the playground may be another reason for lockdown or a nearby fire with noxious fumes. How does a school inform pupils and staff in a rapid manner that they are to find a place of safety within the school and stay put.

## IP SPEAKERS

An announcement via IP speakers is a good solution but offers no visual alert as well. These speakers also require wiring which takes time and money to install so is very dependent on a school's budget. The advantage, of course, is that once the system is in the speakers can be used for a whole range of alerts – wet play, class change, all clear etc.

## USING THE FIRE ALARM

Some Schools use fire alerts for lockdown but this can be fraught with problems and confusion. If the alerts are already being used for break time, adding in a further sound for lockdown can lead to confusion and possibly the incorrect procedure being adopted or a delay in appropriate action. Should the fire alarm therefore be considered for lockdown? For smaller sites it is a possibility, particularly if only one sound is currently being used but it is not an ideal solution as confusion as to whether the alarm means evacuate or stay put is the obvious flaw to using this option.

## OTHER VOICE SYSTEMS

So, are live voice-based systems the answer? Again, there are pitfalls. Language of course is a barrier and as most lockdown systems will be prevalent in inner city location this can be a real problem. A lockdown message with an in-built alert on loop can work in many cases, particularly if the school has regular lockdown drills. However, these tannoy announcements rarely cover outside areas such as playing fields due to cabling so schools with sprawling sites or several outbuildings may not be able to use this option.

## ALERTS VIA THE MOBILE PHONE NETWORK

Mobile phone systems are also an option but these come with their own problems. Firstly, the school may have a policy about mobile phone use during learning times. Unless the school looked at providing all staff members with a handheld device purely for lockdown or emergencies, relying on personal phones is pretty much a no-go area.

## HANDHELD DEVICES

Another option is handheld devices issued to personnel which can be used to alert staff to a variety of problems, not just lockdown events. However, these systems generally rely on colour coding to inform users of the type of event and could be open to misinterpretation. They are also reliant on staff wearing or carrying the devices at all times and keeping them charged.

## OUR SOLUTION

The Alertex system is an alternative which offers battery powered units which can be deployed anywhere. They offer an audible AND visual alert to pupils and staff and are distinguishable from fire alerts which of course mean evacuate the building. The Alertex Lockdown system comprises of battery-operated units which can be quickly installed on the school site over a weekend or even at the end of the school day, thus minimising disruption to the learning environment. Battery life is around three years. A maximum of 64 units can be installed per site, up to 1km apart. When one Alertex is activated it will trigger all units in range to sound an audible alert or lockdown message, accompanied by a flashing beacon light.

Both internal and external variants are available and decibel levels can be adjusted accordingly. Alertex units can sound a variety of alerts to differentiate them from a fire alarm – there are 32 sounds to choose from. Alternatively, an annunciator variant can be ordered which has a built in strobe. There is a standard lockdown message or the school may wish to record their own.

There is also an option to use the Nexus PC app which allows one central location, normally the school office, to monitor and control activated units. From here the user can re-set the system after activation, although the original depressed call point will have to be manually re-set. A silent test can be made via the PC app or a short or longer test if needed. The PC app also has an email function which allows for a specific email group to be advised of the severity of the lockdown event.

In conclusion, whilst all schools will consider the safety of pupils and staff a top priority, budget restrictions for a lockdown system will be an issue. It is vital that the school carry out a regular fire and security risk assessment of the premises and review it regularly. Staff should be made aware of potential risks and subsequent mitigating measures that have been put in place and know the difference between a fire alert (meaning evacuation) and a lockdown alert (meaning stay on the premises and make your way to your classroom or nearest place of safety). Regular training and testing of any equipment should be carried out. The main criteria must be that all occupants are alerted to a lockdown situation quickly and that there is no room for confusion. It is vital that whatever system the school chooses, that the operation and policy behind the system is communicated to all members of staff.

If you would like advice or a site visit to view the Alertex range, please contact Andrew Hughes at ADJ Fire and Security on 07502 088 770 or email [andrew@adjfireandsecurity.co.uk](mailto:andrew@adjfireandsecurity.co.uk).