

TALKAPHONE TOWERS ADD SAFETY TO BOSTON PARK

Park safety in Boston is at the forefront of Thomas M. Menino, the Boston Mayor's, agenda after a recent violent attack

Menino ordered the Ronan Park installation of the first of 5 emergency phone towers. Today, the 5 towers are a part of the city's 2-year vision to install the vandal-resistant units in public parks throughout the entire city.

The towers, manufactured by Chicago-based Talkaphone, are designed to quickly connect distressed users, with the touch of a button, to municipal police while automatically transmitting their location to the dispatcher. At the same time, a constantly lit blue light/strobe mounted on top of the 9 1/2-ft.-tall tower immediately starts flashing, alerting anyone in the surrounding area of trouble.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

The park installations required a stand-alone unit capable of wireless communication that could also accommodate the park's switched power conditions and have the ability to maintain itself in Boston's frigid winter temperatures.

City official chose Talkaphone's Radius Emergency Phone Tower System to meet the unique challenges of the Ronan Park project.

ACCOMODATING SWITCHED POWER

Because of the power supply in Ronan Park is only configured through its lighting system, the tower would have to conform to this same configuration in order for power to be supplied to its blue light/strobe, faceplate light, and internal components. Since power is only supplied to the park at night, a Talkaphone Power Charging System (PCS), including a battery, charger, and a step-down transformer, was enclosed in the tower.

PCS powers the tower throughout the day with battery operation, and then shuts off and recharges at night when power is being supplied through the park's light power source. The system requires 6 hrs. of charging time per day and provides a minimum of 42 hrs. of autonomy, allowing the unit to be able to miss one complete charging cycle and still remain fully operational.

Should the batteries, for any reason, fall below the correct charging level, the PCS provides a contact closure which goes to the phone for an automatic call to a non-emergency maintenance number. When the call is answered, the tower then automatically plays a message identifying the location of the unit in need of service.

BYPASSING PHONE LINES

Because of limited access to traditional phone lines, it was understood that the emergency phone in the tower would have to function wirelessly.

With a cellular interface installed in the tower, the Ronan Park Emergency Tower is a completely wireless device. When the emergency phone is activated, a call is placed automatically through the cellular service provider.

COMBATING THE COLD

The last obstacle to overcome in the installation process was Boston's winter temperature that commonly falls well below freezing. Because the cellular interface inside the tower has a minimum operating temperature of 14oF., a freezing temperature could cause the entire unit to malfunction.

To maintain a reasonable minimum temperature, a thermostatically controlled heater was installed inside of the NEMA-certified (National Electrical Manufacturers Association) enclosure, along with the cellular interface. Whenever the temperature inside the unit drops below a certain level, the thermostat triggers the heater to activate. After the temperature inside the unit stabilizes, the heater deactivates automatically.

MONITORING THE EMERGENCY PHONE

With installation requirements met, the final touch to Ronan Park's new security feature was management. Obviously, this task would be the responsibility of the Boston Police Force.

Not only were plans made for the tower to be accompanied by two officers patrolling the park during a new evening shift, but the tower was connected to the Boston Police Department's monitoring system through Talkaphone's Emergency Phone Diagnostic Software Program.

FUTURE PLANS FOR BOSTON PARK

Since the installation of the first tower in Ronan Park, 4 more have been installed in the South Boston area. The money for the phone towers is supplied through the city's capital and current operating budgets. The city's vision to install more than one hundred towers over the next few years will be accredited by the city's related departments' efforts to raise the funds for the project.

We want people to be comfortable, Mary Hines, a spokeswoman for the Boston Department of Parks and Recreation.

of people that are coming from the T Station and going to their homes.

According to Hines, the emergency tower enhanced the experience of Ronan Park by providing a sense of security.