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SAFETY & SECURITY

by Michael Zuidema

Ensuring Safety with On-Campus and Stadium AED Compartments

Sudden cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in the United States, claiming more than 350,000 lives annually, according to the American Heart Association.

In the past, Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and similar devices were largely operated by local EMS personnel, as factors like size, cost and complexity inhibited their use. Thanks to recent advances in technology, though, many of those limitations have been erased.

It has become clear in recent years that cardiac-related ailments are not the exclusive domain of either the out-of-shape or the elderly. The deaths of several young athletes, for example, have been highlighted by the media in the past half-decade, and while these tragic cases may be rare compared to those who suffer from heart attacks, there's no question that it's important to have a plan in place for heart-related emergencies.

It's no surprise then that more and more colleges and universities are making the pragmatic choice to include AEDs in their infrastructure plans. Considering that AEDs have the potential to improve survival rates by as much as 50 to 80 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, that prevalence will only continue to increase.

As critical as the presence of AEDs can be, there is far more involved than simply hanging one on a wall. It's important to be aware of all the options and advantages available to be as prepared as possible during an emergency situation that involves sudden cardiac arrest. That includes the pedestal and call box help points commonly known as blue light phones in campus environments.

Many blue light phones on the market have the option to be equipped with temperature-controlled AED compartments. As important as these pedestals and call boxes are in reporting crimes and suspicious individuals, there are a number of reasons why adding AED housings might be a good choice for college and university locations looking to improve their safety.

PHONE CONNECTION

The Federal Occupational Health Agency recommends that an emergency communication device be located near an AED that can be used to call security, EMS or 911 personnel. This ensures that not only has additional help been alerted, but first responders also have the opportunity to walk an individual through first aid. Since blue light phones are equipped with hands-free speakerphones, efficient and effective contact can be made with assistance at the touch of a button.

ALERT AUTHORITIES

In addition to notifying first responders during a health emergency, blue light phones continually monitor the AED compartment to see if it has been opened, tampered with or is malfunctioning. If any of these instances occur, personnel are instantly notified to respond to a specific spot, eliminating the need to manually test blue light phones and providing pinpoint location during an incident.

The AED itself, of course, should be inspected regularly to safeguard against damage and malfunctions. Most AEDs are expected to last between five and 10 years and even though they are rarely, if ever, used, they need to operate properly at all times.

VISUAL BEACONS

Campuses with large, open areas present a multitude of challenges when it comes to emergencies, whether it's trying to cover long distances to the layout of buildings and other man-made and natural structures. Blue light phones equipped with conspicuous lighting, graphics and paint serve as a clear symbol of help. The locations of these units typically are publicized as well to provide additional awareness and visibility. They also offer an extra level of protection in outdoor environments.

EASY ACCESS

AED compartments that can be opened both on site and remotely provide a swift

response time. By taking the appropriate steps to be in compliance with important laws and regulations, like the Americans with Disabilities Act, a section of the population also won't be inadvertently excluded. It also is a good idea to consult local EMS personnel to establish that all of the right steps are being taken.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Naturally, colleges and universities will be understandably concerned about their liability in situations involving an AED and sudden cardiac arrest. While it's always a good idea to consult the proper legal representatives, most Good Samaritan laws now include the use of an AED. While these will vary state to state, AEDs seem to offer more benefits than risks, while also presenting a strong commitment to health and safety to the community.

In fact, a recent study indicates that more than half of all Americans now expect to have AEDs available in public places like schools, stadiums, shopping malls and airports. Even with this level of expanded awareness and availability, there are many locations that remain ill-prepared to provide the type of assistance that could save lives.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, the chances of survival from an incident of sudden cardiac arrest decrease 7 to 10 percent for every minute that passes by without defibrillation. No one ever expects an emergency situation to occur, but by utilizing the multifaceted advantages that a blue light phone offers, you'll be ready if one arises.

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