THE END OF THE LINE: HOW THE PHASE-OUT OF PLAIN OLD TELEPHONE SERVICE COULD IMPACT CAMPUS FIRE-SAFETY

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Beginning in 2018, some fire alarm signaling systems could lose their ability to provide emergency forces notification, and your campus could be affected.

Nearly a decade ago, AT&T petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to permit plain old telephone service (POTS) to be discontinued. Maintenance of the ubiquitous and outdated copper-wire system had become a burden due to the declining use of the service and was slowing needed investment in replacement technologies. The FCC ultimately granted the request, and the transition is scheduled to begin next year.

Since communications are now often transmitted via broadband or IP-based technologies, such as cellular, cable TV, or fiber-optic networks, this will be a seamless transition for most of us. However, some fire alarm systems use a digital alarm communicator transmitter (DACT) to transmit alarm signals to a supervising station via a POTS line(s). Although other technologies have been available for some time, many DACTs remain in use. The loss of their only means of signal transmission will render them inoperable and non-compliant.

Supervising station service is not required for all fire alarm systems. *NFPA 101® Life Safety Code®*, 2015 edition, does not require emergency forces notification for buildings containing classrooms and/or offices unless a supervised automatic sprinkler system is utilized to permit a code option (e.g., increased exit travel distance, delayed egress systems, etc.). Emergency forces notification *is* required for all new dormitories and where the fire alarm system is replaced in an existing dormitory. Locally-adopted codes or standards could extend the requirement, as well.

In order to ensure the continued safety of students, faculty, and guests, campus fire alarm systems – especially those in dormitories – should be checked to determine whether a DACT and POTS line(s) are being used to provide emergency forces

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notification and whether such service is required for the type of occupancy. If so, the system should be upgraded to use an alternative technology before the POTS lines are removed.

If you have any questions about an installed system, contact your local fire alarm company and/or your supervising station service provider.

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