



## Elgin company designs wireless alert for cops

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Thursday, December 04, 2014 7:00 AM

It started with discussion following the tragic 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, where 20 children and 6 adults were killed by a lone gunman.

That discussion led to the development of a security system that two Elgin business owners hope will prevent future Sandy Hook-type tragedies.

John McNutt and John Shales are the creators of the BluePoint Alert System, designed to speed emergency notification to police and alert others in the building.

The system looks and acts similar to a fire alarm system. Blue pullboxes are installed throughout the building. When a box is activated, an alert is immediately sent to a call center, who then notifies the local police. In addition, an automated message is broadcast through the building's public address system, and a text/e-mail alert is sent to a list of building officials.

In areas where it may be difficult to hear a PA — like a school cafeteria or gym — a box with a blue strobe light is activated to give a visual cue that the alert has been activated, according to McNutt and Shales. In addition, a remote activator is available and can be worn around the neck of key personnel, who can activate the system within a 2 mile radius of the building.

To top it off, the entire system is wireless, so it doesn't require installing an infrastructure to support it.

"It's simple and intuitive to use. There's not a lot of training needed," Shales said. "The most common comment we get is 'Why haven't we been doing this before now?'"

That simple and intuitive system recently earned BluePoint the Product of the Year award from Security Products Magazine, for its ability to reduce time off police notification and building-wide broadcasts during incidents.

And that's not a bad deal for two businessmen who aren't in the security or technology business. Shales and McNutt own Shales McNutt Construction, a commercial design and build company that has built a number of public buildings, schools and libraries.

McNutt explains the genesis of BluePoint came shortly after the Sandy Hook tragedy, when he was talking with Central Community School District 301 Superintendent Todd Stirn.

"We really were struck (by the incident) and thought, 'what can we do to help improve the situation?'" McNutt said. "It was much of a thing that we've got to do something.



John McNutt, left, and John Shales developed the BluePoint Alert System, designed to improve first responder times and building wide alerts in the case of a school emergency, like a gunman entering the building.  
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The wireless pullbox and remote alarm are a part of the BluePoint Alert System.



A blue strobe light is installed in areas where it may be difficult to hear when an alert is activated.



The BluePoint Alert System was named Product of the year by Security Products Magazine.

“(Stirn) said all buildings have fire alarms, we should do something for police as well,” McNutt added. “I came right back and talked with John (Shales).” After some further discussions with **Ken Volkening of Fox Valley Fire & Safety**, they developed the concept that became BluePoint, he said.

Since launching BluePoint in late 2013, they have installed about 30 systems in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, New Mexico and Wisconsin, and have about 12 projects pending, according to McNutt. He added that word-of-mouth and media attention has increased nationally as they add more buildings to their list.

“People really resonate with this solution,” he said.

Cost of the system can vary from around \$25,000 to \$40,000 for a small to medium sized elementary school. McNutt notes that, because the system is wireless, it is very flexible and can be built to meet budgets of local school districts.

“We’ll provide a solution that’s complete, but we can install a partial system without all bells and whistles and they can add on to it later,” he said. “It’s completely expandable.”

While schools are the main focus for the product, the system can also be used in other buildings, such as movie theaters, libraries or office buildings, where an additional level of security may be helpful.

“The idea came as a result of school violence, but people are seeing it translated into many different types of buildings,” McNutt said.

The bottom line, they stress, is that BluePoint is a way to prevent another school tragedy from happening.

“The last death in a school from a fire was over 56 years ago,” McNutt said. “That’s a system that works, so why not use that same thought process for a solution to this?”



*After some further discussions with Ken Volkening of Fox Valley Fire & Safety, they developed the concept that became BluePoint*

## Product makers tap into local resources

The BluePoint Alert System is gaining traction nationwide as a product designed to improve police response and notifications of school emergencies.

But its roots are firmly planted in the suburbs.

BluePoint creators John McNutt and John Shales, in developing the system, conferred with **Ken Volkening, president of Elgin-based Fox Valley Fire & Safety**, which sells and installs fire alarm systems. The BluePoint system uses the same principles as a school fire alarm system.

The BluePoint pullboxes and strobe light alarms are manufactured by System Sensor of St. Charles, a Honeywell company and global supplier of fire and life safety devices. And the monitoring company BluePoint uses is Emergency 24 Inc. based in Des Plaines.

McNutt said partnering with the local companies in creating the system has been beneficial in getting BluePoint to market. In particular, he noted Emergency 24 has agreed to elevate BluePoint alerts to its top level priority, which adds to the system’s ability to notify police in as little as 10 seconds.

“We think they are the cream of the crop of central stations,” McNutt said.

Even before launching BluePoint, McNutt said, they consulted with Elgin Police Chief Jeff Swoboda and Kane County Sheriff Pat Perez to see if it’s a solution that law enforcement would support. Both like the idea, he said

“If it doesn’t make sense to the police, then we don’t want to do it,” McNutt said. “We haven’t met one law enforcement official who didn’t like it.”