LiveSafe App Seeks to Crowdsource Campus Safety Information

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The University of Arizona has a new tool in its efforts to improve campus safety: the smartphone.

LiveSafe[^1], an app available for iOS and Android phones, was developed in order to provide real-time interaction for UA students and employees reporting security and safety concerns.

The UA entered into a licensing agreement with LiveSafe in May 2015, giving all UA students and employees access to the app's secure tip-reporting platform for free. Organizations that use LiveSafe can monitor reports in real time, which makes it easier to identify areas where security might be a concern.

"The tools and information to enhance security throughout any college campus already exist," said Katherine Chalmers, director of marketing for LiveSafe. "With LiveSafe, it's our intention to create a centralized hub so everybody knows where to access it."

LiveSafe users can connect directly with the [UA Police Department][2] to report traffic accidents, noise disturbances, drug/alcohol/tobacco use, harassment, theft, vandalism and suspicious activity. With LiveSafe, users can send texts, photos, videos and location information directly to the relevant UA office. The UA is the only institution in Tucson currently working with LiveSafe.

"We have seen that so many people are much more comfortable sending us a text message or a photo than they are making a phone call," said George Eppley, a crime prevention officer at UAPD. "That information shows up immediately on our dispatch screen, which allows us to respond in the most efficient way possible."

A key component of the LiveSafe app is the ability to report these incidents silently and anonymously.

"Sometimes, a person is in a situation where calling in a crime can put them in harm's way," Eppley said. "Having the ability to report a crime without having to reveal your identity can make a world of difference."

One feature, called "SafeWalk," uses a smartphone's GPS system to allow a friend, colleague or family member to virtually walk with the user, monitoring their location on a real-time map, and even chat via the app. An alert is sent to both smartphones if the user doesn't reach their destination by the estimated time of arrival.
In 2016, LiveSafe was named one of the 10 apps every college student should download by The Huffington Post [3], with a specific mention of the SafeWalk feature.

"SafeWalk is particularly helpful for students and faculty who frequently study and work during evening hours," Chalmers said. "The person on the other end of the interaction doesn't need to have LiveSafe, either. If a student wants a parent or friend in a different city to make sure they get home safely, the app will send the student's location directly to the web browser on the other person's phone."

The UA is one of more than 100 higher education institutions that use LiveSafe. Students and faculty can use the app to report a variety of concerns not just urgent safety matters.

"We find that it's helpful for people to use the app in nonemergency situations in order to gain confidence and comfort with the platform, so that if they eventually have to use LiveSafe to report something major, they'll know their way around our interface," said Carleigh Smith, an implementation consultant at LiveSafe.

LiveSafe also can be used to report building maintenance issues, such as spills or broken locks, as well as incidents of vandalism.

On the UA campus specifically, it can be used to anonymously send video or photo evidence of anyone violating the University's smoke-free campus policy, which recently was updated to include e-cigarettes.

LiveSafe was co-founded in May 2013 by Shy Pahlevani, a victim of a violent robbery, and Kristina Anderson, who was wounded in a campus shooting six years earlier.

Anderson was a sophomore at Virginia Tech when, on April 16, 2007, a gunman opened fire, killing 32 and wounding 17. Anderson was shot three times. It was her belief that the shooting could have been prevented if there had been a central repository to quickly and anonymously upload vital tips and information that were otherwise scattered throughout a variety of platforms.

"If smartphone capability was as widespread back then, I probably would have seen an email, texts or pictures all pointing to this one incident on campus. But we had no prior knowledge anything was going on," Anderson told the Los Angeles Times [4] weeks before the LiveSafe launch.

In addition to its real-time reporting features, the app includes information on the UA's emergency procedures, the UAlert notification system, emergency phone numbers and a list of UA-approved safety tips.

LiveSafe can also take users directly to the UAPD website, Parking and Transportation Services, Campus Health, SafeRide, Risk Management and the UA homepage.

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