Imagine you are driving to work one Friday morning, looking forward to wrapping up what has been a great week. But as you approach campus, you encounter a road closure that has blocked the route you usually take to your parking area.

By the time you figure out an alternate way to get there, you're running behind and arrive 10 minutes late for a meeting.

Not the type of surprise you were bargaining for that day? Turns out a simple text message could have made the difference between a happy, TGIF kind of morning and a harried, stressful start to the day.

Road closures that affect traffic on and around campus are among the situations that are shared via UAlert, a free service that delivers emergency alerts to UA students, employees and others by text message and email.

While current student and active employees receive the notices through their UA email accounts, they also have the option of receiving them by text message. Friends and family also can subscribe for the alerts.

What many might not know is that opt-in subscriptions do expire after four years.

According to UA Police Department Chief Brian Seastone, a considerable number of accounts expired just this year, and his department is urging people to check their subscriptions and renew them if needed.

"UAlert is really vital for people to have," Seastone says, "because it is the most effective and quickest way for our department to get information out about a critical event that is occurring on campus, and to make sure people get the most up-to-date information about what we need them to do or not to do."

All the information necessary to sign up is available on the UAlert homepage.

What Qualifies for a UAlert Message?

Seastone assures that the messaging system is reserved for critical events only.

"Some may say a gas leak may not be a critical event, especially if it's not anywhere close to where they might be, but if we have to close off an area, potentially evacuate people and redirect traffic, it does become a critical event that affects the campus as a whole."
"We use it very strategically," UAPD's chief says. "Nobody has to worry about getting text alerts announcing a sale at the bookstore or anything like that."

UAPD follows a protocol in deciding what goes out on UAlert, Seastone says. That decision is made on a case-by-case basis and may include events or incidents off campus, if there is a chance of repercussions for the UA community.

"Let's say there was some big issue downtown, and we know we have a lot of students and faculty that frequent that area, so we might send out a UAlert to the effect of 'FYI: TPD has closed an area downtown, stay away,' or something like that."

UAlert is not to be confused with another, email-only messaging service, the Clery Timely Warnings.

"Clery Timely Warnings would be sent out if there was an ongoing threat to the campus," Seastone explains. "For example, if we had several reports of assault over days or weeks. In that case, we would not send a text through UAlert, but an email, which we can send within a seven-day window. Those warnings usually are about incidents that involve some kind of pattern."

**Living Safe: There is an App for That**

To make campus life even safer, Seastone recommends another resource: LiveSafe, a smartphone app that is available at no cost to anyone with a UA NetID. Designed by the victim of a violent robbery and a survivor of the Virginia Tech shooting, the LiveSafe app provides users with the ability to report suspicious activity directly to UAPD via text message.

"It's all about the simple but effective motto, 'If you see something, say something,'" Seastone says.

In addition to its texting feature, LiveSafe allows users to send photos or videos, and do so anonymously if desired.

"We encourage people to use LiveSafe to report suspicious activity," Seastone says, adding a caveat. "If someone witnesses a crime in progress, we'd rather have them call 911, because we need information that we have to give to the officers quickly, so we want that person talking to us."

For certain situations, though, LiveSafe may be a more effective, and potentially safer, tool to notify authorities.

"For example, let's say there is a very agitated person in a classroom, and you don't want to pick up the phone to not aggravate them further," Seastone says. "In that situation, you can use LiveSafe to notify us discreetly."

*Read more about LiveSafe in this LQP story.*

**Not Obsolete: Blue Light Phones**

With smartphones being a ubiquitous sight on campus and connectivity ever increasing, it's easy to forget the emergency phones installed across the UA, or dismiss them as obsolete.
They're not, Seastone says.

"We have quite a few people on campus who don't have cellphones," he says, "and don't forget we have many visitors. The blue light phones may become obsolete with time, but they still are very useful to us."

Because the phone stations are equipped with GPS and placed in such a way that two of them always are in a direct line of sight, a person who is being followed, for example, can leave a trail of their whereabouts by pressing the call button and alerting UAPD on each phone they pass.

"This allows us to send officers very quickly to the right location and take care of the situation," Seastone says.

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