MU fixed emergency alert system problem after test

By Mollie Barnes
July 29, 2013 | 3:46 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Last week’s test of MU’s emergency alert text messaging system identified thousands of people from University Hospital, MU Extension and the University of Missouri System who did not receive the messages.

The test Thursday morning showed that 2,873 people who aren’t directly a part of MU were not sent the messages, said Terry Robb, a spokesman for the MU Division of Information Technology.

The problem was that the administrator who sent the text did not have the necessary "top sender" status, Robb said.

He said he has since given the higher status to all administrators who have the authority to send emergency alerts. Right now, 14,741 people are signed up to receive them.

The test last week showed that the new program, which is run through Blackboard Connect, had a 99 percent success rate with all the messages sent.

Last week, Robb said there still is no way to guarantee all of the messages are being delivered; system operators can only guarantee that messages are being sent out. Phone companies control delivery of the messages, he said, and sometimes they treat them as spam and do not deliver messages until hours later or sometimes not at all.

Anecdotal results showed people signed up to receive text alerts were receiving them within a few minutes after they were sent.

MU got the new system because the contract with the old vendor, Cooper Notification, had expired.

Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.
Video games can be a haven from the world, and it's easy to imagine that they would appeal to children who struggle with social interaction.

Boys with autism spectrum disorders or with ADHD are both prone to problematic use of video games, according to a study.

The researchers asked the parents of boys ages 8 to 18 to report on their child's video game use, including hours of use and the types of games they play.

The boys with autism spectrum disorders spent twice as much time playing video games as did the typical boys, two hours a day compared to one. The boys with ADHD played 1.7 hours a day on average.

That means that the boys with autism or ADHD were reaching the maximum two hours a day for screen time set by the American Academy of Pediatrics, before adding in TV or other screen use.

Earlier studies of children with ADHD or autism also have found increased use of video games, but this is the first study to compare the two with typically developing children.

The boys with ADHD or autism also scored higher on a test intended to measure dependence on video games. The more inattentive symptoms they had, the more likely they were to score higher for problematic video game use. The study authors speculate that because children with autism often have restricted interests and preoccupations, they may be more likely to become overly dependent on video games.

And boys with ADHD or autism were far more likely to have video game systems in their rooms. About 43 percent of them had systems in their rooms, compared to 12 percent of typical boys. (No word on how iPods and other mobile devices factor in.)

Put that all together, and it's enough to lead a parent to think that video games could be linked to some of the difficulties experienced by children with these disorders.

But the researchers, at the University of Missouri's Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, say it's impossible to say from their study if the video games are causing problems or if children with problems are more likely to be drawn to the games.
"Longitudinal studies are needed to extend this research and to examine the long-term effects of screen-based media use in children with [autism spectrum disorder]," the researchers wrote. Their study was published in the journal Pediatrics.

Until then, there needs to be more awareness of potential risks of video game use, the authors write, particularly in clinical care settings for children with autism or ADHD.

One of the more intriguing nuggets from this study is the game preferences of the three groups of boys. The typically developing boys were big into first-person shooter and sports games. But the boys with autism or ADHD were more likely to choose action games or role-playing games. "First-person shooter games are fast-paced, audiovisually intense, and violent, and game play often results in increased physiologic arousal," the authors write.

That, they speculate, is more than many children with autism spectrum disorders or ADHD can handle.
Video games for kids with autism, ADHD may become addictive

Video games can be a preferred pastime of child and teen boys, but new research suggests those with autism or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be at greater risk for problems from playing the popular devices.

Pediatricians report that kids with autism and ADHD may be more likely to engage in problematic video game habits that may raise their risk for being addicted to the games.

ADHD is the most common mental health disorder for U.S. children, affecting nearly 7 percent of kids between ages 3 and 17, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in May. Those with the disorder may have trouble paying attention, controlling their impulsive behaviors and may have difficulties at school.

About one in 50 U.S. children have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which can range in severity from mild to severe. The disorders may cause intellectual and social impairments, language difficulties and unusual, repetitive behaviors.

"These results suggest that children with ASD and those with ADHD may be at particularly high risk for significant problems related to video game play," wrote the researchers, led by Dr. Micah O. Mazurek, a psychologist at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

For the study, researchers surveyed parents of 141 boys between the ages of 8 and 18 about their children's video game usage. They were given questionnaires that looked at how many hours of games they played daily, whether they could access the games in their rooms and any symptoms of problematic gaming. Fifty-six of the children had autism, 44 had ADHD and 41 had typical development.

The study only looked at boys due to higher rates of the disorders among males compared to females.

The researchers found boys with autism played video games about twice as long than typically-developing children (2.1 hours per day vs. 1.2 hours, respectively).

Problems with inattention were strongly associated with problematic video game use and children with autism and ADHD, compared to those who were typically developing. Problems with hyperactivity were not linked to video game use for either condition.

Boys with autism were more likely to prefer role-playing games, which may be an additional risk factor for problematic use and addictive behavior. Study participants with autism or ADHD also were more likely to have a gaming system in their bedroom, further increasing their risk for addictive video game behavior.
Video game addiction isn't a formal diagnosis, the researchers point out. Studies suggest it shares properties with other addictions, because of potential for building up a tolerance to games, withdrawal, relapse and associated changes in mood.

The study was published July 29 in Pediatrics. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limited screen time for older children to less than 1 to 2 hours per day of educational, nonviolent programs. This includes television, video games and Internet time. The average child engages in about seven hours of daily screen time, the academy notes.

However, some researchers have found touch-screen apps for tablets may bring benefits to children with autism.

Study points to "shared biology" between 5 psychiatric disorders

CDC finds mental health woes in one in five U.S. kids

Air pollution exposure while pregnant linked to autism risk

Dr. Andrew Adesman, chief of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York in New Hyde Park, told HealthDay that video games provide a diversion that doesn't require interacting with peers, which is often a problem for boys with ADHD and autism.

"Mastery of a video game by a boy with ASD may lead to improved self-esteem," said Adesman. But, he added it's not necessarily a good idea for these children to isolate themselves in the bedroom playing video games.

"It is important to understand how video games and other technologies can be used to help support and educate individuals with autism," Andy Shih, senior vice president for scientific affairs at Autism Speaks, said to CBSNews.com in an email. "This study highlights some issues that, if confirmed and elaborated by additional research, could inform decisions on when and how to use these technologies to maximize benefits and minimize potential risks."
Panel backs lung cancer screening for some smokers

For the first time, government advisers are recommending screening for lung cancer, saying certain current and former heavy smokers should get annual scans to cut their chances of dying of the disease.

If it becomes final as expected, the advice by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force would clear the way for insurers to cover CT scans, a type of X-ray, for those at greatest risk.

That would be people ages 55 through 79 who smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for 30 years or the equivalent, such as two packs a day for 15 years. Whether screening would help younger or lighter smokers isn’t known, so scans are not advised for them. They also aren’t for people who quit at least 15 years ago, or people too sick or frail to undergo cancer treatment.

"The evidence shows we can prevent a substantial number of lung cancer deaths by screening" — about 20,000 of the 160,000 that occur each year in the United States, said Dr. Michael LeFevre, a task force leader and family physician at the University of Missouri.

Public comments will be taken until Aug. 26, then the panel will give its final advice. Reports on screening were published Monday in Annals of Internal Medicine.

The recommendation is a big deal for many reasons. The task force, an independent group of doctors appointed by the government, in recent years has urged less frequent screening for breast and cervical cancers, and no screening for prostate cancer, saying PSA blood tests do men more harm than good. There are no good ways to screen for ovarian cancer or other less common types.

But lung cancer is the top cancer killer worldwide. Nearly 90 percent of people who get it die from it, usually because it’s found too late for treatment to succeed. About 85 percent of lung cancers in the U.S. are attributable to smoking, and about 37 percent of U.S. adults are current or former smokers. The task force estimates that 10 million Americans would fit the smoking and age criteria for screening.

The American Cancer Society used to recommend screening with ordinary chest X-rays but withdrew that advice in 1980 after studies showed they weren’t saving lives. Since then, CT scans have come into
wider use, and the society and other groups have endorsed their limited use for screening certain heavy smokers.

The scans cost $100 to as much as $400 and are not usually covered by Medicare or private insurers now. But under the new health care law, cancer screenings recommended by the task force are to be covered with no copays.

"It's generally going to be covered by all health plans" if the advice gets final task force approval, said Susan Pisano of the industry trade group America's Health Insurance Plans. She said her group may develop a response during the public comment period but has had "high regard" for the task force in the past "because they rely so heavily on the evidence" in crafting their recommendations.

The task force considered lung cancer screening in 2004 but said there was too little evidence to weigh risks and benefits. Since then, a major study found that screening the age group covered in the task force's recommendation could cut the chances of dying from lung cancer by up to 20 percent and from any cause by nearly 7 percent.

Screening "is absolutely not for everybody," not even all smokers, LeFevre stressed. That includes President Barack Obama, who said a couple years ago that he had quit smoking. Obama is too young (he will turn 52 in a few days) and too light a smoker (he reportedly smoked less than a pack a day), to be in the high-risk group advised to get screening.

The potential benefits of screening may not outweigh its possible harms for people not at high risk of developing lung cancer. A suspicious finding on a scan often leads to biopsies and other medical tests that have costs and complications of their own. The radiation from scans to look for cancer can raise the risk of developing the disease.

"These scans uncover things, often things that are not important. But you don't figure out that for a while," and only after entering "the medical vortex" of follow-up tests, said Dr. Peter Bach, a cancer screening expert at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

The best way to prevent lung cancer is to quit smoking or never start, and screening doesn't make smoking safer, doctors stress.

"That's everyone's public health concern: People will see this as a pass to continue smoking," Bach said of screening. "I don't think it's likely," because people know how harmful smoking is, he said.
The Tribune's View

Future of the fairground

A lingering moment of truth

By Henry J. Waters III

Monday, July 29, 2013 at 2:00 pm Comments (2)

Using the most opportune moment, TAG Events LLC says it plans to discontinue management of the Boone County Fairgrounds, now renamed the Central Missouri Events Center.

TAG is the local private group the Boone County Commission has hired to manage the grounds. TAG has collaborated with the fair board to manage the Boone County Fair, which ended Saturday after a successful run. As pleasant memories of the fair linger, TAG delivers the uncomfortable news: It might not want to continue beyond June 30, 2014, putting an onus on all hands to make a new arrangement soon.

As Northern District Commissioner Janet Thompson said in remarks at the annual fair ham breakfast, county government and its constituents will have to decide among three options, "Shutter it, brush hog it once a year so you can have the county fair, or utilize it in a way that maximizes the potential."

She said the latter is the hardest, given the limitations of the county budget.

A University of Missouri research team found a $332,000 boost to the local economy from only four events staged in 2012, the first chance to look at the benefits of new management under TAG. This is only a hint of the potential economic impact from the facility.

If properly managed, of course. TAG has said all along its involvement is intended to be temporary, and now it gives a year's notice. One wonders whether this decision is unalterable, depending on negotiations bound to occur in the meantime, but it only makes sense to take TAG managers at their word.
The announcement will kick all hands out of the starting gate, renewing the commission's obligation to make another arrangement. TAG has given everyone a valuable three years to plan for the future. Before its contract, the commission was kicking the can down the road, extending inadequate management that did not work well for the fair, the county or the citizens of this area. We've seen a better future. We must go for it.

I have long prayed in this column for additional collaboration between the city and the county. The county owns the facility, and the city has estimable expertise in managing parks, recreation and events. A properly run fairground will be among the most important assets in the area, providing unprecedented entertainment opportunities and large economic benefits to match while offering public value far beyond immediate effects on local government budgets.

If TAG would continue for a while, that would be fine. The group has done a good job, made even more obvious with the successful fair. In fact, if TAG can promise to deliver the kind of weather fairgoers enjoyed this year, we might have an even larger role for the organization.

Jocularity aside, Thompson accurately lays out options, but only one makes any sense: to manage the facility for maximum potential. Officers and others with influential roles in framing the future should put other options out of mind.

If I were in charge, I'd quickly dig into renewed discussions with the city. No matter what arrangement the county might envision for management of the facility, collaboration with the city should be fully exploited. For its part, the city should welcome this discussion. I'm hard put to think of a similarly promising venue for expanded economic enhancement.

Most citizens hereabouts are constituents of both governments, ready to benefit from proper development. Let's get this done.

HJW III

Our lives would run a lot more smoothly if second thoughts came first.

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Posted in The Tribunes View on Monday, July 29, 2013 2:00 pm.
The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center on Monday announced a major $45 million expansion that will accommodate 100 new scientists and help solidify the region’s reputation as a growing bioscience powerhouse.

The center’s board of trustees approved the plan on July 18 after the Missouri Development Finance Board announced $4.5 million in tax credits for the project.

“This is a major growth phase that we’re entering into,” said James Carrington, the center’s president. “We’re very excited about this.”

The St. Louis region employs about 28,000 people in the biotechnology field — a number that will grow, leaders hope, as more top-flight researchers are attracted by the growing clout of the region’s bioscience assets.

“This is significant both within and outside of St. Louis,” said Denny Coleman, president of the St. Louis County Economic Council, which helped secure the tax credits. “Being able to feed and fuel the world through these scientific discoveries that are being made at the Danforth center, not just through the addition of some of the best talent from around the world, but through spinoff companies and other commercialization activities — that adds significantly to the growth of the region.”

The center’s building, finished in 2001, houses 227 employees in nearly 170,000 square feet of lab, office and greenhouse space. The new facility will add nearly 80,000 square feet, housing state-of-the-art lab spaces that can be modified to accommodate new approaches in scientific research.

“Our building is a wonderful building. It’s got decades and decades of productive life in it,” Carrington said, of the center’s headquarters, a striking glass-and-steel box near the intersection of Olive and Lindbergh boulevards. “But science does change, and what we demand out of the space changes with the science.”

The addition, slated for completion at the end of 2015, will enable researchers to work within a nontraditional lab environment that accommodate advances in robotics, bioinformatics and group approaches to research.
"These things don’t fit conveniently in the traditional lab building,” Carrington added. “We’ll be able to reconfigure the space, because the furniture will be mobile, flexible. The new building will be able to accommodate current science and future science much more easily than the current building does."

The center plans to break ground next year. It also plans to complete a nearly 17,000-square-foot greenhouse later this summer, adding to its nearly 28,000 square feet of greenhouse space.

The center, founded in 1998, has become a cornerstone in the region’s agricultural bioscience community, earning a reputation as the best of its kind. Just within striking distance of the center BRDG Park provides 110,000 square feet of lab space for bioscience startups, and the Helix Center provides lab and office space for early-stage companies. The area, across the street from biotech giant Monsanto Co., is considered home to more plant scientists than any other area in the world.

“The expansion will have follow-on effects,” Carrington said. “Our scientists collaborate with startup companies, many of which are recruited to this area because of the center. Some of those companies will spin out of the labs here at the center. All of that will accelerate with this expansion. With increased numbers of principal investigators, you’re going to see in the future more spin-outs, more products, more companies attracted to the region.”

Carrington said the center will now embark on fundraising efforts, but would not provide more detail.

“We don’t plan to make any announcements on the process,” he said. “There are two major components that we’ll need to focus on. First is the money to build the building. Second, we’ll need to grow our endowment. ... A hundred new scientists means we’ll have to increase our endowment significantly.”

The not-for-profit center focuses its research on plant breeding and biotechnology with the goal of providing improved plants, royalty-free, to growers in areas where disease and drought often prevent crops from thriving. The center has also dedicated much of its recent research to sustainable, plant-based biofuels.

The center’s work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Energy, the National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Howard G. Buffett Foundations.

The center was founded through a $60 million gift from the Danforth Foundation, a $50 million gift from the Monsanto Fund, the donation of 40 acres of land from Monsanto Co., and $25 million in tax credits from Missouri.

The Danforth Foundation gave its final major gift, of $70 million, to the center before dissolving in 2011.