Tools&Equipment

Latest storm warning product update

Editor's note: The information presented here was supplied by Lauren Manix from Tunheim Partners for Schneider Electric.

THE NORTHWEST INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (ISD) is located in the northwest corner of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. The district has 14,000 elementary, middle school and high school students, with total enrollment expected to double by 2030. There are two high schools, Northwest and Byron Nelson. Northwest High School has more than 3,200 students and more than 1,200 of them are involved in outdoor activities.
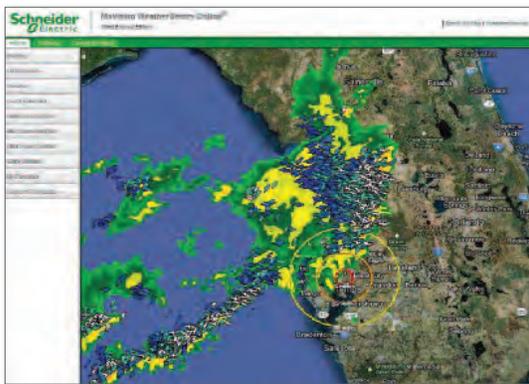
Like most Texas high schools, Northwest High School's primary weather challenges are lightning, severe storms, tornadoes and high winds. Northwest ISD includes the two high school campuses and a shared stadium located approximately 1 mile from Northwest High School. The district needed a solution that would provide critical alerts and weather information for all locations.

Northwest ISD has 10 user licenses to Schneider Electric's MxVision WeatherSentry Online Turf Edition professional package. The system provides access both online and via mobile device, and includes Alert Manager, Lightning Manager, MxVision Weather Information Notification System (WINS), and the ability to ask weather questions to an experienced meteorologist any time of the day or night.

Alert Manager notifies the team of significant weather changes within their chosen coverage area. This customizable tool can also sound alarms for changes to weather conditions like wind speed, or when the National Weather Service issues a watch, warning or advisory.

Lightning Manager gives advance warning to dangerous weather conditions by using real-time lightning data rather than predictions that can lead to false alarms or delayed reporting after lightning has struck.

MxVision WINS delivers instant, personalized weather alerts on any email compatible cell phone, PDA, pager or PC. It constantly monitors user-specified weather parameters at chosen locations, allowing turf managers to focus on other duties.

"A week after subscribing to the product, I received a text alert for lightning in our area," said Scott Fletcher, Northwest High School's head athletic trainer. The school receives a watch alert when lightning is detected within 30 miles, and a warning when lightning is within 10 miles.

School policy dictates students must be moved indoors when lightning is detected within 10 miles. "At this time, not only did we move the freshman football team to our indoor practice facility, but we moved the band indoors as well," Fletcher continued. "Less than 5 minutes after we had everyone inside and safe, our band director witnessed a lightning bolt hit the parking lot where the band was practicing. In light of this event, we already consider the system as having paid for itself, as it prevented injury to our 150 band members."

In addition to the watch and warning lightning alerts, the school receives an all-clear alert, letting them know when it is safe for student athletes to return to the field. District policy states they must wait until 30 minutes after the last lightning strike detected within 10 miles, before returning outdoors.

They also have alerts set for precipitation and high winds. "Our coaches like to know what's coming," Fletcher stated. "When rain is expected, they may put away their good equipment, or move practice indoors all together."

The district is currently working on a heat policy. Fletcher said when it is established he will set an alert for heat indexes as well.

The location-based alerts and forecasts enable the district to monitor up to six locations at a time. "We looked at the other systems out there, but would have had to purchase a different system for each campus," Fletcher said. "With this system we can monitor all locations, plus we can change locations when on the road, and get alerts for away games."

Exclusive to Schneider Electric's product is the online consulting tool, which is available 24/7. This allows you to type in a weather question and receive an answer from a Schneider Electric meteorologist within 15 minutes. "We use the consulting quite a bit — typically asking whether or not we can practice that afternoon," said Fletcher. "It's nice to get a professional's opinion, and to have them verify what we're seeing. They get back to us quickly." ■

Q&A

Q: What infrastructure and technology must be in place to install and use the package?

A: No existing infrastructure is necessary. MxVision WeatherSentry Online is a web-based solution that can easily be accessed anywhere—at the office, on the field, or at home. The solution is accessible on PCs, tablets and mobile devices for ease of access across platforms. Map and radar views can be customized in a full-screen interactive mode to monitor severe weather on one interface.

Q: Is a public warning system part of the package?

A: No.

Q: Do you pay more for alerts on different weather events or is it all-inclusive?

Alerting is all-inclusive with our Platinum and Professional packages. Schneider Electric offers patented, location-based alerts on the conditions of most importance to the client. Common conditions customers set alerts for include lightning, wind speed, temperature, wet bulb globe temperature for heat stress and more. Alerts can be set up for geographically specific areas or a radius around an area, and customers can choose to be alerted both to those conditions as well as all-clear alerts. Once setup, the customer will receive the alerts on both their PC and mobile device, plus they can have these same alerts sent to more than one member of their staff.

Q: How does the consulting feature work, and is that an extra cost?

A: Online consulting is a standard feature in our Platinum and Professional packages. From the product, the client simply types in their question, and receives an answer within minutes from one of our experienced meteorologists. Users can even ask and receive questions from their mobile devices. Questions and corresponding answers are also posted from others in your same region/industry. Questions are answered. ■