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Tenafly's Borough and Board of Ed Team Up for Safety



By Peter Rustin
Mayor, Borough of Tenafly



Thanks to a Shared Services Agreement Tenafly is in the process of implementing a state-of-the-art, lightning safety system at nine athletic fields and parks.

With a population of over 14,000 residing in approximately 4.6 square miles, the Borough of Tenafly is a busy place! Dotted throughout the borough is an assortment of recreational fields and parks used throughout the year for school-related and other community activities.

For example, our annual Fourth of July fireworks display draws thousands of residents to one of our largest open spaces. As a former recreational soccer official, President of the Little League, and basketball league, I have spent countless hours on our borough's athletic fields.

During a game last year, we heard thunder and the portable lightning detection box I had with me went off. As we cleared the field, I saw a huge bolt of lightning that appeared to strike about a town away. The next day we read in the newspaper that a man had indeed been struck. For me it was a wake-up call. It makes no sense to hold events in open spaces, unless you can protect the residents. I take this personally.

Taking Action Today, as Mayor of Tenafly, I am in a position to make a difference within this community and am proud to say that we are in the process of implementing a state-of-the-art, lightning safety system at nine athletic fields and parks. However, I could not have accomplished this without the full support of the Borough Council and cooperation of our Board of Education (BOE). The BOE is deeply invested in our community: it owns six of our schools and grounds and their own central office. Since the nature of both the board of education and the municipality is to serve our population, it only makes sense that we work together to maintain the quality of life that we have created within our borough.

"The Borough and Board of Education each have different resources available to them," stated Lynn Trager, Tenafly's Superintendent of Education. "By working together as one entity and integrating both physical and financial resources from within the same municipality, these resources are transformed into assets that benefit everyone. This type of cooperation clearly puts us ahead of the curve."

How it Works

Plan ... Detect ... Respond ... Recover



Shared Services Thanks to the development of a Shared Services Agreement, our community will now be protected with a lightning safety system and alerting solution from *WeatherBug*, *Earth Networks™* that is integrated with numerous lightning detection sensors strategically located

warning lead times and enables us to effectively coordinate emergency services to provide comprehensive weather management planning.

How the System Works When centrally located weather equipment detects a lightning strike within 10 miles, the system triggers an alert that a lightning emergency is in effect. On-field equipment activates an audible siren and flashing strobe light signal that alerts people to take shelter. These signals continue for the duration of the lightning warning. Once the all-clear notification is sounded, participants can return to their field activi-

Because we take weather so seriously, with the guidance of our borough engineers at Maser Consulting P.A., we are in the process of installing this system on borough and BOE properties. The system's central monitoring system will be in the Department of Public Works facility.

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ties. How the signals work is the most important information to convey to our residents.

"During system testing and prior to activation, we will conduct a joint outreach program to inform residents about the protocols for responding to system alerts," stated Jewel Thompson-Chin, Tenafly Borough Administrator. "Community outreach will occur through multiple techniques, including automated call system notifications, the community newsletter, school flyers, the borough website, police and recreation social media sites and press releases."

The WeatherBug Achieve component, software that provides online classroom learning experiences about weather and storm activity, was included in the equipment purchase. This program will be used as an educational tool in borough schools.

Shared Use Agreement Many municipalities have tried to make sharing services within their communities work to no avail. Unfortunately, at times, politics can actually be an impediment in getting things done. Since the BOE owns and oversees school facilities and grounds, it has to have a close connection with borough government. Effective communication between us is imperative.

Today's technology makes this so convenient and efficient that we have integrated our communications through a Shared Use Agreement. The BOE's IT Department will manage Tenafly Borough's local and wireless computer network and assist with all aspects of daily operation, maintenance and training. In turn, through an Addendum, the borough allocated funding for the installation of a gener-

ator within the BOE computer center that will maintain viable network communications between us and emergency services during severe storms and electrical outages.

Joint Use Meetings, held throughout the year, enable us to address problems, find viable solutions, and explore new areas for shared projects. Our Shared Agreements are formally executed with the costs and logistics clearly stated so that there is no problem with responsibility down the road. In the event that a problem arises, it can usually be resolved through an addendum.

Other joint projects include:

- the Smith School Pedestrian and Traffic Circulation Study;
- Borough Hall Wi-Fi installation;
- turf and track reconstruction at the high school field; and,
- shared use and cooperative scheduling of fields and school gymnasiums.

Ensuring Success The secret to our success has been the high level of communication and cooperation between the borough and the board of education. Having served previously as a board of education member has enabled me to see both sides of the fence more clearly and has undoubtedly aided in this partnership. Both entities have a clear vision of maintaining our residents' quality of life, which is highly dependent upon the full and safe use of our recreational areas. We're committed to pooling our resources to ensure this.

The one thing that we are still working on is how to enforce the execution of, and adherence to, the rules and procedures for field evacuation and how to make a safe return to the field activities. Since the success of our system

Lightning Safety Tips

According to NOAA, National Weather Service, if you are caught outside with no safe shelter, the following actions may reduce your risk of being struck or injured by a lightning strike.

- Immediately leave elevated areas such as hills, mountain ridges or peaks.
- Never lie flat on the ground.
- Don't shelter under an isolated tree.
- Never use a cliff or rocky overhang for shelter.
- Immediately get out and away from ponds, lakes and other bodies of water.
- Stay away from objects that conduct electricity (barbed wire fences, power lines, windmills, etc.)

relies on the cooperation of those using the fields (such as students, coaches and parents), we need to ensure that the proper action will be taken when the warning sirens sound. We are investigating language for a potential ordinance that can be attached to the field permitting process.

Today's technologies are an asset in communication between the borough and community members. It is our hope that residents will take our efforts to protect them seriously and comply with these new safety measures. Our Borough Council and Board of Education are making every effort to enhance the level of services to the community—from both sides. ▲



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