Radio connects, protects UL
Device will aid campus security

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The national consulting firm Dewberry and Davis will offer advice on how UL and the other seven campuses within the UL System can improve their campus security and preparedness plans.

The firm is reviewing plans on each campus and will offer recommendations for improvement later this fall, according to a release from the system office Wednesday.

"It's good to bring in a set of outside eyes to look at plans and policies on a regular basis, especially in light of the hurricanes two years ago, most recently Virginia Tech, it was time to bring in someone who can look at the waterfront of issues and review our plans," said Brad O'Hara, UL System associate provost and vice president for student affairs.

"Dewberry will sit down with each of our campuses one on one and provide feedback about their plans. We anticipate that will be done before Christmas."

UL is moving ahead with its new emergency preparedness plan with the installation of new emergency radio system nearly complete.

At the start of the semester, the university announced its plans to outfit departments across campus with inexpensive weather band radios as one way to alert its campus of an emergency.

Following the 2005 hurricane season, campus began reviewing their preparedness and response policies. Legislation this past session mandated that public postsecondary institutions create emergency response and crisis communication plans in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings.

At UL, the radios are another level of notification that's been created at the institution. Phone and e-mail notification systems already existed and this fall, the university added its radio system and a text messaging system.

UL launched a free emergency text messaging service through ulticampus.com. To read more about UL's security plan, go to safetylouisiana.edu.

"Just like our colleagues nationwide, we live in a different world now," said Mike Abbiatti, associate commissioner for information and technology.

In December, the Board of Regents will be updated on plans to offer each postsecondary institution the assistance of an alert notification system.

At the start of the fall, UL offered free registration to faculty and students for an emergency text messaging service. But interest in signing up for the service has been weak. Only about 10 percent of the campus has signed on to receive the alerts.

"I'm having trouble either getting the word out or convincing our students and employees to do this," said Joey Pons, UL's safety director.

"We're not unique," he added. "I think part of it is people are hesitant to give their personal information to a company for fear that they'll sell it to someone else. That cannot happen with our agreement."