



# Luxury Condominium Complex Receives More Reliable, Manageable Fire Alarm Solution

The recently upgraded fire alarm system at the Gulf and Bay Club in Sarasota, Florida has been a big improvement for the condo community's residents, management and the guards at the gated beach community. The Gulf and Bay Club is comprised of six apartment buildings, each with as many as 70 individual condominium residences as well as several out-buildings.

The system, which was installed by Sarasota-based Fire Brigade Alarm Systems, comprises 12 Farenhyt IFP-2000 fire alarm control panels from Silent Knight, networked together by fiber optic cable. The new addressable system's immediate identification of alarm locations and ease of monitoring one network by tying together each building's systems have improved its maintenance and management -- ultimately providing better protection for condo residents. Utilizing an IP (Internet Protocol) line for reporting fire alarm signals to a central monitoring station has also helped to reduce costs while increasing the system's communications reliability.

"It's a modern system," commented Connie Bittle, general manager for the Gulf and Bay Club. "It's put us in a whole different place."

## Condo Control Challenge

Before the installation of the Farenhyt system, the Gulf and Bay Club had an older fire alarm that left a lot to be desired.

The system originally included smoke detectors in every residential unit. Over the years, a number of condo owners had enlisted private contractors to renovate their units, which

frequently led to the removal of smoke detectors and/or notification devices. Some units were even found to have standalone 120 Volt smoke detectors. Tampering and removal of these devices are often not detected by older conventional fire alarm systems, which can lead to significant liability issues.

"Sometimes the unit contractor would splice wires together so the system would keep running and we had no idea what devices were missing and not being monitored by our system," said Bittle.

When the older conventional system registered an alarm, a sounder in the guardhouse indicated in which building the alarm was triggered, but offered no other specifics as to its location. When guards investigated, they often had to check the building floor by floor, even unit by unit, to determine where the alarm had occurred.

David Perna, president of Fire Brigade Alarm Systems, noted another problem with the previous system. For monitoring purposes, the systems in the individual buildings were connected to a main fire alarm control panel via underground copper wiring, making the system highly vulnerable to lightning strikes, which occur frequently in this coastal Florida location.



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By the time the Gulf and Bay Club began shopping for a new fire alarm, the previous system had been struck by lightning multiple times, generating numerous service calls and thousands of dollars in damages.

### **An Identifiable, Reliable Solution**

Fire Brigade Alarm Systems recommended the Farenhyt fire alarm system to Gulf and Bay Club, in part because of its ability to use fiber optic cable rather than copper wiring for communications. Thus far, the Club's new system has suffered none of the common transient power issues typically caused by lightning.

*"We're happy with it. We have better devices, better access to information and better control in terms of what unit contractors are doing."*

– Connie Bittle, General Manager  
for Gulf and Bay Club in Sarasota, FL

In addition, the new system delivers individual point identification for each of the facility's more than 800 smoke detectors on the network, providing guards an exact location of each device in alarm. The new system also sends a "trouble signal" to the guard if anyone removes a smoke detector or tampers with other devices on the network. Now management need not be as concerned with the possibility of some unit owners jeopardizing their own fire protection.

Noting that a community like the Gulf and Bay Club can see as many as 30 or more unit owners making renovations in a year, Bittle observed, "That's 30 potential problems in the system that can no longer happen."

The copper wiring that supported the previous fire alarm had also handled the telemetry controlling the elevator systems in the individual residential high-rises. When the power went out, the generator could only handle powering one elevator in each high-rise. The telemetry for this operation is now being handled over the fiber optic network, avoiding lightning issues and creating a supervised method of telemetry.

"With the Farenhyt system, we were able to combine that system into the fire alarm system," explained Perna. "Now because the elevator and generator systems no longer rely on the copper wiring, it too, is less vulnerable to lightning strikes."

The simple addition of a smaller control panel in the guard station provides security an immediate means for monitoring alarms. The Gulf and Bay Club agrees having access to real-time fire alarm information as well as an historical log of events has enhanced its ability to proactively address alarm and trouble events.

The new system communicates signals to a central monitoring station over a cable modem Internet connection, utilizing a phone line for backup. The previous system used two dedicated phone lines, which was a bit more costly on a recurring monthly basis.

When two phone lines are used for fire alarm communications, the report of a break in communications with the fire alarm system could potentially go unnoticed for as long as 24 hours since the integrity of that connection is only required to be tested once a day. The Farenhyt system's Internet communicator is supervised once every five minutes, thereby alerting the central station in a more timely fashion of any outages.

### **Extreme Expansion**

Initially Fire Brigade Alarm Systems was hired only to upgrade the system in the six high-rise apartment buildings. But Bittle and her team were so happy with how the system functioned that before long, Fire Brigade was extending the system to include five additional buildings. The Farenhyt IFP-2000 can connect with as many as 16 fire alarm control panels using fiber optics, so expanding the system was no problem.

Since the installation was complete, the system has been working fine, Bittle said. "We're happy with it. We have better devices, better access to information and better control in terms of what unit contractors are doing."

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