AAPA Lighthouse Award-Excellence in Technology Solutions & Security Practices

PORT PASCAGOULA

AlertAware®

Prepared by: Joseph Powell, PPM,MPE

April 30, 2026

Port Pascagoula

Closing the Gap: Transforming Port-Wide Emergency Communication with ALERTUS

Closing the Gap: Transforming Port-Wide Emergency Communication with ALERTUS

Background

As Mississippi's largest seaport, the Port of Pascagoula is a critical hub for international trade, economic growth, and sustainable development along the Gulf of Mexico. Our strategic location and efficient maritime infrastructure support a wide array of industries and connect global markets to the Southeastern United States. As a port authority, we are responsible for ensuring the safety, security, and operational continuity of a complex, multi-tenant maritime environment.

The Port operates across multiple facilities with a constantly changing population of employees, tenants, contractors, and vendors. This dynamic environment presents a significant operational challenge, as it requires ensuring that all personnel can be reached immediately in emergencies.

Historically, the Port relied on traditional communication methods such as phone calls, emails, and radio traffic. While effective under normal conditions, these methods proved insufficient during time-sensitive incidents requiring immediate, coordinated action.

This gap was clearly exposed during two critical incidents in 2025.

On June 20, 2025, a suspicious package incident at the adjacent Ingalls Shipyard required rapid coordination and the elevation to MARSEC Level II. Communication during this event relied heavily on manual outreach, resulting in delays and inconsistent messaging across stakeholders.

On August 22, 2025, an active shooter incident at Ingalls Shipyard required the Port to immediately lock down all access points and evacuate personnel from high-risk areas. During this incident, security personnel were forced to contact companies and individuals on-site manually, highlighting a significant communication gap—particularly with vendors and transient personnel.

These incidents demonstrated that while the Port could execute security operations effectively, it lacked a centralized, real-time communication system capable of reaching all stakeholders simultaneously.

Purpose

To eliminate this vulnerability, the Port implemented the **AlertAware (ALERTUS) mass notification system**, transforming emergency communication from a fragmented, manual process into a centralized, real-time operational capability.

3033 Pascagoula Street
Post Office Box 70
Pascagoula, MS 39568-0070

info@portofpascagoula.com
portpascagoula.com

P: 228.762.4041
F: 228.762.7476

The purpose of this initiative extends beyond basic alerting. AlertAware provides a comprehensive emergency communication and incident management platform that delivers rapid, reliable, and redundant messaging across multiple channels, ensuring message delivery regardless of user location or device availability.

The system establishes a single, authoritative communication platform for the Port, supporting both routine operations and high-consequence incidents. One-touch activation and pre-scripted emergency templates enable leadership to initiate immediate responses, eliminating inefficiencies associated with manual notifications.

A critical advancement is the system's two-way communication capability, which allows leadership to confirm message receipt, track personnel status, and receive real-time updates from the field. This enhances situational awareness and supports faster, more informed decision-making during emergencies.

By integrating ALERTUS into onboarding and access procedures, the Port ensures that all personnel—including vendors and contractors—are connected to the communication network from the moment they enter the port.

Goals and Objectives

The implementation of the AlertAware (ALERTUS) system was guided by a set of clearly defined goals and objectives to address identified communication deficiencies and strengthen the Port's overall emergency response capability. These goals were not only focused on resolving immediate operational gaps but also on establishing a long-term, scalable framework for communication, coordination, and resilience.

Establish real-time, port-wide communication across all stakeholders
The primary objective was to create a centralized communication platform that could deliver critical information instantly to all individuals operating within the Port's footprint. This includes employees, tenants, contractors, vendors, and external partners. By implementing a system that delivers simultaneous, multi-channel alerts, the Port ensures that all stakeholders receive consistent, timely, and actionable information, eliminating delays and reducing the risk of miscommunication during emergencies.

Eliminate communication gaps involving vendors and transient personnel.
A key vulnerability identified during prior incidents was the inability to reach non-permanent personnel, including vendors and contractors, effectively. These individuals represent a significant portion of the daily workforce within the Port environment. To address this, the Port

established policies requiring all incoming personnel to be enrolled in the ALERTUS system as part of onboarding and access procedures. This objective ensures that no individual operating within the Port is excluded from emergency communications, effectively closing a critical operational gap.

Improve emergency response speed and coordination.
Another core objective was to enhance the speed and coordination of response actions during critical incidents. By replacing manual communication methods with automated, one-touch alerting capabilities, the Port significantly reduces the time required to initiate protective measures such as lockdowns, evacuations, or operational adjustments. Simultaneous communication across all stakeholders enables coordinated action, improving overall response efficiency and effectiveness.

Enhance accountability and situational awareness.
The implementation of two-way communication capabilities enables the Port to move beyond one-way notifications to real-time incident management. Leadership can now confirm message receipt, monitor personnel status, and receive updates directly from the field. This objective strengthens situational awareness, reduces uncertainty during incidents, and enables faster, more informed decision-making at all levels of operation.

Institutionalize communication as a core operational function
Rather than treating communication as a standalone tool, the Port sought to embed ALERTUS into its operational framework. This includes integrating the system into security protocols, onboarding procedures, and daily workflows. By institutionalizing communication in this way, the Port ensures long-term sustainability, consistent usage, and continuous readiness across all departments and stakeholders.

Strengthen overall port resilience and operational continuity.
Beyond immediate emergency response improvements, the initiative was designed to enhance the Port's ability to maintain operations during disruptive events. Reliable communication is a foundational component of resilience, enabling the Port to adapt quickly to changing conditions, minimize operational downtime, and maintain stakeholder confidence during crises.

Implementation & Resources

Following the August 2025 active shooter incident, the Port of Pascagoula initiated the rapid implementation of the AlertAware (ALERTUS) system through a focused, phased deployment strategy designed to prioritize speed of execution, operational integration, and long-term

sustainability**.** The objective was not only to deploy a technology solution, but to embed it as a permanent and reliable component of the Port's emergency management framework.

The implementation process began with identifying critical communication requirements based on lessons learned from prior incidents. These requirements included the need for immediate, simultaneous notification across all stakeholders, system reliability across multiple communication channels, and the ability to support real-time coordination during high-consequence events. AlertAware was selected due to its ability to meet these operational demands through a scalable, multi-channel platform.

The system provides redundant communication capabilities**,** including SMS, email, voice calls, and mobile push notifications, ensuring message delivery across a wide range of devices and environments. This redundancy is critical in a port setting, where personnel may have varying levels of access to technology and may be distributed across large operational areas. Additionally, the use of pre-configured messaging templates and one-touch activation enables leadership to initiate emergency notifications instantly, eliminating delays associated with manual message development and distribution.

A defining component of the implementation was establishing policy-driven integration, which ensured the system's effectiveness beyond its technical capabilities. The Port adopted formal procedures requiring all vendors, contractors, and tenants to enroll in the ALERTUS system as part of their onboarding and access process. This policy transformed the system from an optional communication tool into a mandatory operational requirement, ensuring full stakeholder inclusion and eliminating the communication gaps identified during prior incidents.

To support successful deployment, the Port conducted comprehensive training for staff, security personnel, and key stakeholders. Training focused on system functionality, activation protocols, and role-based responsibilities during emergency scenarios. This ensured that all users understood not only how to receive alerts, but also how to initiate and respond to them appropriately. In addition, the Port developed standardized alert protocols and pre-scripted messaging for various incident types, including active threats, MARSEC level changes, evacuations, and severe weather events.

To maintain system readiness and validate performance, the Port incorporated ALERTUS into its regular training and exercise schedule. Routine testing, drills, and scenario-based exercises are conducted to evaluate system effectiveness, ensure user familiarity, and identify opportunities for continuous improvement. These exercises reinforce system reliability and ensure that communication remains effective under real-world conditions.

From a resource standpoint, the Port implemented ALERTUS using a cost-effective and efficient deployment model**.** The subscription-based platform minimized the need for significant capital investment, while internal personnel were utilized for system administration, user management, and ongoing maintenance. This approach allowed the Port to maximize impact while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Furthermore, the system was seamlessly integrated into existing security and operational workflows, including coordination with port security personnel, adherence to emergency response procedures, and adherence to stakeholder communication protocols. By leveraging existing infrastructure and aligning ALERTUS with established processes, the Port avoided duplication of effort and ensured smooth adoption across all departments.

Overall, the Port's implementation strategy reflects a deliberate balance of speed, efficiency, and sustainability, resulting in a high-impact solution that enhances communication, strengthens emergency response capabilities, and supports long-term operational resilience.

Innovation & Relevance

The implementation of the AlertAware (ALERTUS) system represents a targeted and highly relevant innovation that directly addresses one of the most persistent and complex challenges in port operations: maintaining effective, real-time communication across a transient, diverse, and multi-employer workforce**.**

Unlike traditional organizational environments, ports operate with a constantly shifting population that includes employees, tenants, contractors, vendors, and visiting personnel. This dynamic workforce creates inherent communication challenges, particularly during emergencies when rapid, coordinated action is required. The Port of Pascagoula recognized that existing communication methods were not designed to meet the demands of this environment and required a solution that was both practical and comprehensive.

The Port's approach to innovation extends beyond simply adopting new technology—it lies in integrating that technology into operational policy and governance**.** By requiring all personnel, including vendors and contractors, to enroll in the ALERTUS system as part of onboarding and access procedures, the Port eliminated communication blind spots that are common across the maritime industry. This policy-driven integration transforms the system from a passive tool into an active operational requirement**,** ensuring universal communication coverage at all times.

From a technical standpoint, the system introduces multi-channel communication redundancy, delivering alerts simultaneously through SMS, email, voice, and mobile applications. This

ensures reliable message dissemination even when certain communication methods are unavailable due to environmental factors, device limitations, or infrastructure constraints. This level of redundancy is critical in a port environment, where operational areas are geographically dispersed, and personnel may have varying levels of connectivity.

A key innovation is the system's two-way communication capability**,** which transforms traditional alerting into an interactive process. Rather than simply broadcasting information, the Port can now receive real-time feedback from personnel, confirm message receipt, and monitor individuals' status during an incident. This significantly enhances situational awareness, improves accountability, and enables leadership to make informed decisions based on live operational data.

Additionally, the use of pre-scripted messaging and one-touch activation represents a practical and impactful advancement in emergency response. In high-stress situations, the ability to deliver clear, consistent, and actionable messages instantly eliminates delays and reduces the risk of confusion. This ensures that all stakeholders receive accurate information at the same time, improving coordination and minimizing risk.

This initiative is highly relevant to current and emerging challenges in the maritime industry, including the need for improved emergency response coordination, enhanced personnel safety, and support for real-time decision-making in complex operational environments. It demonstrates how targeted technology, when combined with policy and process integration, can deliver meaningful and measurable improvements.

Importantly, the solution is both practical and scalable, making it applicable to other small and mid-sized ports facing similar challenges. By leveraging a cost-effective platform and embedding it into existing workflows, the Port of Pascagoula has created a model that can be replicated without requiring significant infrastructure investment.

Overall, the implementation of ALERTUS reflects a strategic and forward-thinking approach to innovation, where technology is not only adopted but fully integrated to solve real-world operational problems, enhance safety, and set a new standard for communication in the port environment.

Results, Evidence & Impact

The implementation of the AlertAware (ALERTUS) system has significantly improved the Port of Pascagoula's communication capabilities and overall emergency response effectiveness, resulting in both immediate operational gains and sustained long-term impact.

Immediate Operational Improvements

The most immediate improvement has been the transition from manual, time-intensive communication methods to real-time, simultaneous notification across all stakeholders. Previously, critical information had to be relayed through phone calls and emails, often resulting in delays and inconsistent messaging. With ALERTUS in place, communications are now delivered instantly and uniformly, ensuring that all personnel receive the same information at the same time.

Communication coverage has also been expanded to include all individuals operating within the Port, including vendors, contractors, and transient personnel. By integrating system enrollment into onboarding and access procedures, the Port has eliminated the communication gaps that previously existed, ensuring full inclusion during emergency events.

The system has further improved incident coordination and response execution. Simultaneous notification allows stakeholders to take immediate, aligned action, whether to initiate lockdown procedures, evacuate, or make operational adjustments. This synchronized response capability has significantly enhanced the Port's ability to manage high-risk situations effectively.

Enhanced Situational Awareness and Accountability

A key advancement is the introduction of two-way communication, enabling leadership to receive real-time updates from personnel in the field. This capability improves situational awareness, supports personnel accountability, and allows for more informed decision-making during active incidents.

In addition, the use of pre-scripted messaging and standardized alert protocols ensures that communications are clear, consistent, and actionable. This reduces confusion, particularly during high-stress scenarios, and enhances overall response effectiveness.

Continuous Testing and System Validation

To ensure reliability and operational readiness, the Port conducts weekly system tests on a randomized schedule, occurring at varying times of day and across different days of the week. This deliberate approach prevents predictability and ensures that personnel remain consistently prepared to respond, regardless of when an actual incident occurs.

These randomized tests serve multiple purposes:

- Validate system performance under real-world conditions
- Reinforce user familiarity and responsiveness
- Identify potential gaps or delays in message delivery
- Maintain a high level of readiness across all stakeholders

By avoiding fixed testing schedules, the Port ensures that ALERTUS remains a live, operational system, rather than a static tool used only during planned exercises.

Sustained Organizational Impact

Beyond immediate improvements, ALERTUS has established a lasting shift in how the Port approaches communication and emergency management.

Communication is now a standardized and embedded operational function, integrated into security procedures, onboarding processes, and daily workflows. This institutionalization ensures consistent readiness and strengthens the Port's ability to respond to a wide range of incidents, including security threats, severe weather, and operational disruptions.

The system also enhances the Port's overall resilience and continuity of operations, providing a reliable framework for maintaining coordination and communication in complex, rapidly evolving situations.

Evidence-Based Need and Impact

The necessity and impact of this system are directly supported by real-world operational events:

- During the June 2025 suspicious package incident, communication relied on manual coordination, resulting in delays and fragmented messaging
- During the August 2025 active shooter incident, security personnel were required to contact companies individually, exposing a critical inability to reach all personnel quickly and effectively

These incidents clearly demonstrated that while operational response capabilities were strong, the communication infrastructure did not meet the demands of the environment. The implementation of ALERTUS directly addressed this vulnerability, providing a reliable, scalable, and real-time communication solution that enhances safety and operational effectiveness.

Integration, Adaptability & Scalability

The AlertAware (ALERTUS) system has been fully integrated into the Port of Pascagoula's operational framework, ensuring that communication is treated as a core function rather than a supplemental tool.

Integration

The system is embedded across multiple operational layers, including:

- Security procedures and emergency response protocols
- Vendor onboarding and access control processes
- Daily operational workflows and communication practices

By aligning ALERTUS with existing processes, the Port ensured seamless adoption and eliminated redundancy, enabling communication to serve as a unified, reliable operational capability.

Adaptability

The system is highly adaptable and capable of supporting a wide range of scenarios, including:

- Security incidents (active threats, suspicious activity)
- Severe weather events and natural disasters
- Operational disruptions and safety notifications

Messaging protocols and response procedures can be updated as needed, allowing the Port to respond effectively to evolving risks, regulatory changes, and operational demands. This flexibility ensures long-term relevance and effectiveness.

Scalability

ALERTUS is inherently scalable, enabling the Port to expand communication capabilities without significant infrastructure changes. The system can easily accommodate:

- Additional users and stakeholders
- Expansion of port facilities and operations
- Integration with future technologies and systems

This scalability makes the solution not only sustainable for Port Pascagoula but also replicable for other small and mid-sized ports seeking to enhance communication and emergency response capabilities.

Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

The success of the ALERTUS system is rooted in strong stakeholder engagement and collaboration, both internally and externally. From the outset, the Port recognized that the effectiveness of any communication platform depends not only on the technology itself, but on the active participation, trust, and alignment of all users within the system.

Internally, this meant fostering a culture of shared responsibility, where staff, security personnel, and leadership understand their roles in both initiating and responding to alerts. Clear expectations, training, and consistent system use have ensured that ALERTUS is not viewed as a standalone tool, but as an integrated component of daily operations and emergency response.

Internal Engagement

Port staff and security personnel were provided with comprehensive training on system functionality, activation protocols, and operational responsibilities. This ensured that all internal users understood their role in both initiating and responding to alerts, contributing to effective system adoption and use.

External Engagement

A key component of the initiative was the inclusion of all external stakeholders. Vendors, contractors, and tenants are asked to enroll in ALERTUS as part of their onboarding and access process, creating a fully connected communication network across the Port.

Collaboration Outcomes

This collaborative approach has resulted in:

- Improved relationships with tenants and stakeholders
- Increased confidence in the Port's emergency response capabilities
- Enhanced coordination during incidents through unified communication

By fostering a culture of shared responsibility and open communication, the Port has created a system that not only improves safety but also strengthens partnerships across the maritime and local community

Beacon of Excellence

The Port of Pascagoula's implementation of the AlertAware (ALERTUS) system exemplifies overall excellence by transforming a critical operational vulnerability into a unified, technology-driven communication capability. By integrating real-time, multi-channel communication with policy-driven stakeholder inclusion, the Port has enhanced safety, improved emergency response coordination, and strengthened operational resilience across a complex, multi-tenant environment. This initiative not only delivers measurable improvements in efficiency and situational awareness, but also establishes a scalable model that can be replicated by ports nationwide. Through the alignment of technology, policy, and stakeholder engagement, the Port of Pascagoula demonstrates how innovation can drive meaningful, cross-functional impact within the maritime industry.

Conclusion

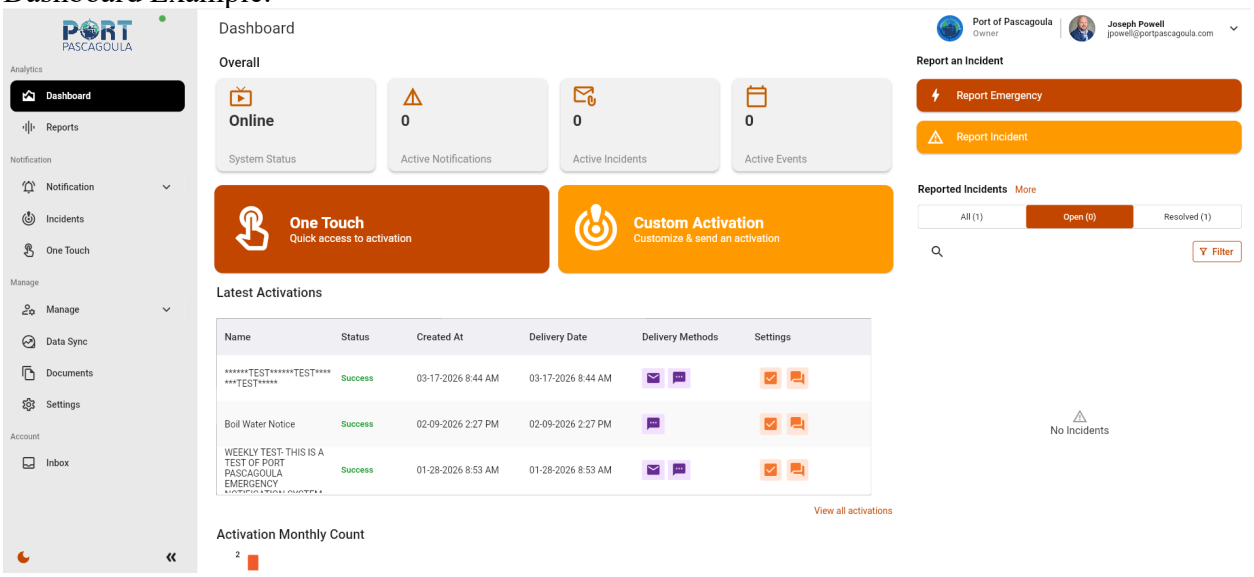
The implementation of the AlertAware (ALERTUS) system represents a critical advancement in communication, safety, and operational effectiveness at the Port of Pascagoula.

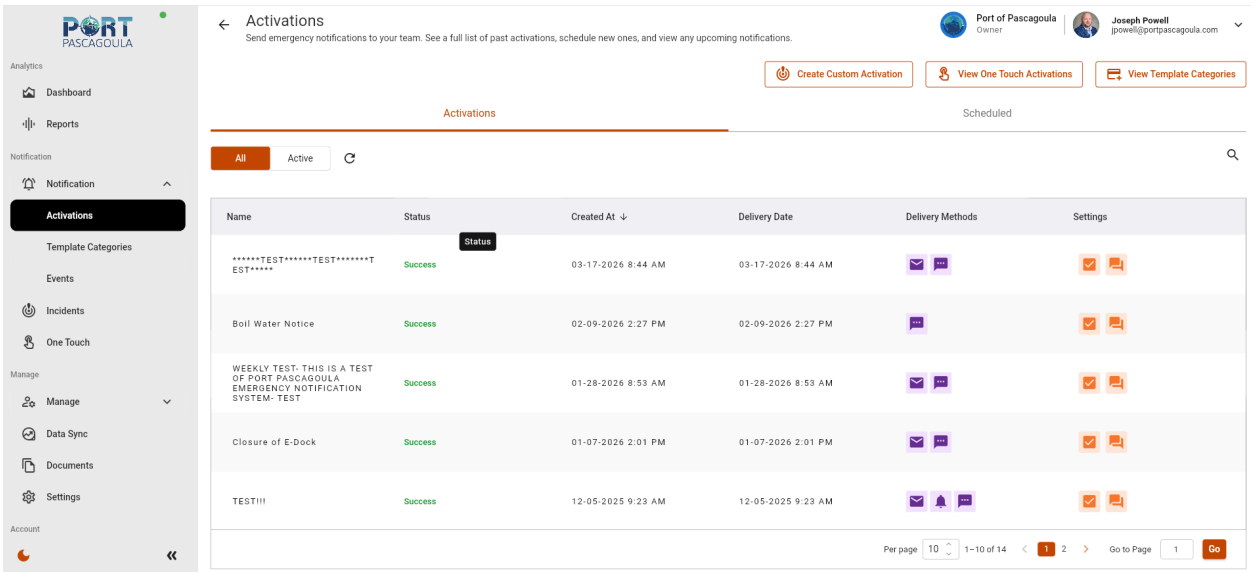
Driven by real-world incidents that exposed significant communication gaps, the Port took decisive action to implement a solution that ensures immediate, reliable communication among all stakeholders. By integrating technology with policy and daily operations, communication has been transformed from a reactive process into a core operational capability that supports safety, coordination, and resilience.

Beyond addressing an immediate need, this initiative has fundamentally reshaped how the Port manages risk and responds to emergencies. The ability to communicate instantly, reach all personnel—including vendors and transient workers—and maintain real-time accountability has strengthened the Port's overall preparedness and operational confidence. Stakeholders now operate within a unified communication framework that promotes clarity, consistency, and rapid response during critical events.

This initiative also reflects a broader shift toward proactive, technology-driven port management, in which targeted solutions are implemented to address real-world challenges with measurable impact. By leveraging a scalable, cost-effective system and embedding it into governance and onboarding processes, the Port has created a sustainable model that will continue to evolve alongside operational demands.

Dashboard Example:





3033 Pascagoula Street
Post Office Box 70
Pascagoula, MS 39568-0070

info@portofpascagoula.com
portpascagoula.com

P: 228.762.4041
F: 228.762.7476