



## PROFILE



**Industry**  
Emergency Services

**Founded**  
1948

**Website**  
[www.cheshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk)

**Category**  
B2B / B2C

**Customer Since**  
2006

## M:Science SMS products help enhance communication for emergency service

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service (CF&RS) provides a 24 hour service to over one million people across the four unitary council areas of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton (Runcorn & Widnes) and Warrington. It is responsible for responding to emergency incidents and providing community safety advice, which helps the organisation reduce risks and improve the safety of the general public and businesses in the area. The Service has 24 fire stations, four community safety centres, three community fire protection offices and a headquarters in Winsford - employing 689 operational staff, 25 control room operators and 256 community safety and other support staff.

### The Challenge

Quick, reliable communication is essential for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service, especially when a major emergency or incident occurs in an area of the county, or there are concerns affecting the general public such as road closures, terrorist threats or severe weather warnings.

When an incident occurs the Service needs to be able to contact firefighters quickly and easily, get vital news to fire authority members, management teams and staff, inform and keep businesses and residents up to date as well as provide the capability for the public to contact the organisation.

The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in October 2004 also dictated that the Service needed a communication system that allowed the deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech impaired to be able to contact Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service. The act requires that those who provide a service to the public make their services reasonably accessible to disabled people so that they can share the same level of goods and services provisions as the able-bodied.

In 2006, Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service explored numerous methods to improve its communication methods and looked for a solution that was easy to use, accessible to all and cost-effective. The Service decided to exploit SMS messaging and selected M:Science's SMS Server, SMS Online and SMS Web Service to integrate SMS into its own systems.

"The fact is the younger generation's preferred method of communication is now text. Additionally, for the deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech impaired, regardless of age, it's an easy and obvious way to pick up public service information and communicate with us," explained a spokesman for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service.

## PROJECT

### Objective

Set up quick communication with staff and management and provide a two-way communication channel for the general public.

### Solution

M:Science SMS Server, SMS Online and SMS Web Service integrated with content management system and text messaging service.



### Business Impact

Improved communication with residents and staff. Also provided a communication channel for the deaf, hard-of-hearing & speech impaired.

“During a crisis the public are able register to a free message system, via the CF&RS website, designed to keep them informed via text SMS. This gives us the ability to send information regarding major incidents.”

## The Solution

During crisis management and for business continuity the SMS text messaging service allows Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service to contact staff quickly and easily – such as sending messages to staff about returning to duty (Management of Strategic Reserve). It also uses the online system (via M:Science SMS Online) to contact firefighters when it needs emergency cover.

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service has also developed a text messaging service, integrating SMS Server into its content management system. This enables the organisation to contact residents, defined by their postcode (up to three postcodes are permitted), during major incidents, to keep them up-to-date on what's happening, the latest developments and any major announcements. The service is simple to sign up to and there's no cost for registering or receiving the alerts. Subscribers simply create an account at [www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/MyAccount](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/MyAccount), enter their mobile number and three selected postcodes, and then click on the 'sign up today' link. The content management system is then capable of sending text messages via SMS Server to people in a particular postcode area. The text message service provides information relating to major incidents, fire safety messages near their homes and



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places of work, where attacks are taking place and information about what to do if people get caught in an incident. Currently there are over 1600 subscribers to the text messaging service.

“During a crisis the public are able register to a free message system, via the CF&RS website, designed to keep them informed via text/SMS. This gives us the ability to send information regarding major incidents. The flexibility of the system means that the public can register with up to three postcodes - home, place of work and perhaps the address of a vulnerable relative. In the future we are going to use SMS text messages to inform the public about recruitment campaigns, jobs, etc.”

The queries are received via email and the system allows the Fire and Rescue Service to respond in the same manner, with these responses being issued in the form of text alerts – a cost effective way to communicate in bulk. The Service always adds a link to the text message, so that users can click on the link to take them directly to the website for more information about the incident.

"Text messaging is extremely useful for the deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired to be able to contact Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service. Not only does the use of SMS broaden the service that we provide, it also prevents any unwitting discrimination on our part, as it allows for equality of access to all."

"The SMS service also allows users to text an information line, which people can use to book/confirm appointments for home and safety checks and to obtain access to all relevant Fire & Rescue Service information. Text messaging is extremely useful for the deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired to be able to contact Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service."

## The Results

The SMS text messaging service has made it possible for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service to send dedicated content to mobile phones and to receive text messages, thus improving communication and allowing it to communicate quickly and easily during an emergency. It also provides an alternative method of communication during crisis management and for business continuity.

Research has shown that people are more likely to see, read and act on messages through their phones than any other form of communication - 90% of text messages are read within four minutes. The majority of people have their mobile phones readily accessible at all times - usually within a few feet - making it an extremely effective form of communication.



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