

Voice Sounders – The Flexible Fire Alarm & Evacuation Solution

Seven years ago the first low current voice enhanced sounder was launched in the UK. Since then, voice sounders have become part of the fire industry vocabulary. Recent advances in voice sounder development enable even quite basic fire alarm systems to be used as modern, versatile evacuation systems.

Often incorrectly referred to as ‘voice activated sounders’, voice sounders that store pre-recorded messages are simply conventional sounders with the *enhancement* of pre-recorded voice messages.



The new 7-message Fire-Cryer® combined voice sounder and beacon

When considering the use of voice sounders over a more traditional voice alarm system (VA), design engineers are often surprised to learn that Vimpex's Fire-Cryer® Plus voice sounder can actually broadcast seven discrete messages on a simple 2-wire radial bell circuit. The Fire-Cryer® is no more complex to install than an electronic sounder or bell.

The use of voice sounders does have many advantages over VA systems in terms of installation and wiring costs. They are a fully integrated part of the fire alarm system and no special training is required to install them.

Great Expectations of Modern Fire Alarm Systems

More and more is expected of fire alarm systems. Fire alarm control panels are becoming increasingly sophisticated and the number of peripheral devices monitored by fire panels is bewildering. Fire alarm systems have evolved into general evacuation and life safety systems and often monitor a wide range of devices:

- Disabled refuges and toilets
- Bomb alerts and panic alarm buttons
- Water leakage detection
- Gas detection
- ‘Door closing’ alarms

With the increased versatility of fire alarm systems, the challenge for the fire engineer is how to clearly and unambiguously advise building occupants of the state of these many alarms.

Fire-Cryer® Plus

As a result of several years of significant investment, the Fire-Cryer® Plus is a combined 7-message voice sounder and strobe. The ability to broadcast such a large number of messages on a conventional 2-wire circuit means that the Fire-Cryer® Plus proves that voice sounders are suitable not just for small systems, but also for large office blocks, hospitals and industrial sites.

Control

In order to switch from message to message, a Voice Message Controller (VMC) interface is installed on the bell circuits, either alongside the panel or interfaced with an analogue loop. The newly designed VMC makes installation even easier and gives the user full control of message selection. Three monitored inputs are supplied so life-critical bomb alerts, panic buttons or disabled alarms are catered for. The VMC ensures synchronisation of messages over multiple sounder circuits.

Programming

Much of the investment into the Fire-Cryer® Plus range was in the design of proprietary software, the 'sequencer', which is used to programme the Fire-Cryer® with customer-defined message strings. With any combination of 7 messages chosen from a multi-lingual library of over 300, the number of possible message combinations is massive. For this reason, the programming and management of the message strings was a very important aspect of the Fire-Cryer® Plus development programme. The same sequencer programme is also used to select which messages are accompanied by a flashing beacon.

Versatility

The new Fire-Cryer® Plus is one part of the Fire-Cryer® range which can all broadcast 7-messages and includes:

- Maxi Fire-Cryer® - IP66 horn for open spaces and industrial sites
- Midi Fire-Cryer® - Sturdy unit, great for shopping centres and warehouses
- Mini Fire-Cryer® - Base mounted sounder for offices and commercial use
- Animate® - Animal Friendly sounder



The Midi and Maxi Fire-Cryer® voice sounders are ideal for harsh noisy industrial environments.

The Future

Voice sounders have come of age. They will never replace the need for full-blown VA systems where live voice broadcasts are a necessary safety measure in large or complex buildings requiring phased evacuation. The Vimpex Fire-Cryer® however has reacted to the needs of the market and an increase in the number of messages available which means that they offer the installer a cost-effective and easily installed way to clearly, visibly and unambiguously signal to the occupants exactly what to do in the case of an emergency.

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