



Customer Study

The City of Houston Utilizes Open Platform Video Technology to Assist the Disability Community and Ensure Voting Integrity

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The City of Houston's Metropolitan Multi-Service Center (MMSC) at West Gray is an anchor site for both government and non-profit programs and services for people with differing abilities. The center serves as one of the largest early voting sites in Harris County. The City of Houston installed the center's first IP video management system, making safety and security a top priority for patrons with disabilities, voters, staff, and building tenants.

Challenge: Securing elections and keeping patrons safe

The Adaptive Sports and Recreation Park at the [Metropolitan Multi-Service Center](#) at West Gray traditionally relied on staff to physically conduct security rounds, both inside and outside the facility on its expansive seven-acre property. Over time, the center needed situational awareness to keep patrons safe while participating in a variety of recreational, sporting, and quality of life activities as well as securing the premises and property during elections.

Solution: Integrated security technology connects the center to the city

[Milestone Systems](#) XProtect® Expert open platform video management software (VMS) integrates partner technologies to provide 24/7 monitoring of the park's facilities as well as election activities. Cameras from [Hanwha Techwin America](#), a server from [Razberi Technologies](#), analytics platform risk management software from [Haystax](#) for monitoring real-time data feeds, microphones from [SoundSecure](#), and a workstation from [Dell Technologies](#) work with the open platform VMS to allow the City of Houston to share data across jurisdictions and departments.

Result: Scalable security for daily operations and biannual elections

The MMSC wanted to improve both situational awareness during election season as well as maintain the quality of life for people with differing abilities. After developing and conducting the first risk assessment for election sites in the Houston region, the MMSC implemented a technology action plan. Using software and equipment from several security manufacturers, the City of Houston was able to mitigate risks at its polling site during May and November elections. This scalable technology can decrease election incidents as well as protect the disability community who use the center daily.

June 2022

Organization

City of Houston
Metropolitan
Multi-Service Center

Location

Houston, Texas

Industry Segment

Government

Solution

Milestone Systems
XProtect Expert

Cameras:

Hanwha Techwin America

Server:

Razberi Technologies

Microphones:

SoundSecure

Workstation:

Dell Technologies

Analytics Platform:

Haystax





Accessible opportunities for people with differing abilities in Houston

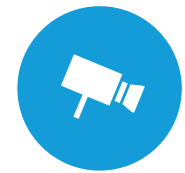
The MMSC has become an anchor site for the disability community in the Houston area. Residents with disabilities make up about 10% of the total population, which equates to approximately 216,000 people in Houston, according to the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). Built in 1982, the center was transferred from the City of Houston Health Department to the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD) in 2006. HPARD's Adaptive Recreation Section was created at this time to offer a variety of recreational, sporting, and quality of life programming for people with disabilities, creating an inclusive environment for people who have difficulties with mobility, cognition, hearing, and vision.

With a capacity of 350 people, the center's mission is to be a leader in providing meaningful opportunities for citizens to fully participate in accessible sports, recreation, and wellness activities. Opportunities include structured classes, a fitness room, a full court gym, an indoor heated pool, a beep baseball field, a tennis court, a quarter-mile outdoor trail, and an urban garden. Adaptive recreation programs offer wheelchair users the opportunity to participate in fast-paced sports such as basketball, rugby, power soccer, and table tennis. In 2011, the facility opened an all-abilities playground to ensure that both children with and without disabilities can play together in an inclusive environment.

"It was important for the city to be able to monitor not only security issues, but also quality of life," said Gabe Cazares, director of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. "Having real-time alerts for falls and other situations needing immediate assistance is an important aspect in providing public service and quality of life for Houston's citizens."

Assessing and addressing risks at the MMSC polling location

In addition, the center is used as a polling location for local, state, and federal elections held in Harris County — during both the early voting period and on election day. Opening approximately two weeks prior to official election days in May and November, MMSC serves as an early voting site to accommodate up to 8,000 voters per voting year.



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Gabe Cazares,
Director,
Mayor's Office for People
with Disabilities



According to a report from the Harris County Election Security Task Force, five incidents occurred at MMSC during the 2020 presidential election early voting period and on election day, including voter intimidation, the use of sound amplification devices within 1,000 feet of the polling location, and a request for help with traffic and pedestrian control. A total of 77 incidents were reported among all 122 early voting and 806 election day polling locations.

As one of the largest voting sites in Harris County, MMSC was required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to conduct a risk assessment to identify threats and security vulnerabilities at voting sites throughout the region, and ultimately develop an action plan to mitigate risks.

This focus on developing critical infrastructure protection began in 2006 with the creation of the Regional Asset Management Program (RAMP). The goal of this program was to increase the efficiency of critical infrastructure data management and included analyzing security risks, threats, vulnerability, and consequences. The findings are documented in the Haystax asset catalog that has served as a guide to increase situational awareness and help city officials make informed decisions on physical security, terrorism, fire hazards, and other aspects of critical infrastructure.

Additionally, in 2020 another regional need was identified by the Homeland Security Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). This stipulated that grant recipients must address election security within at least two grant-funded projects: one addressing cybersecurity and one focused on soft targets.



Based on these requirements from FEMA and Homeland Security, the City of Houston turned to security manufacturer partners, including Milestone Systems, Hanwha Techwin, Razberi Technologies, Haystax, SoundSecure, and Dell Technologies, to address security issues at MMSC. The City of Houston's General Services Department (GSD) and Houston Public Works (HPW) combined forces to complete the installation in only three weeks in May 2021.

"We addressed the FEMA and Department of Homeland Security requirements by creating a site assessment for voting sites throughout the region, but then we went one step further by recommending security technology based on the assessment findings," said Jack C. Hanagriff, who was program manager at the City of Houston's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security during the installation, but he has since retired. Today, he continues to advise on public safety and mobility issues as a consultant for the Houston Smart City Program through the Mayor's Office of Innovation.

With increased traffic and the potential for voter safety issues during upcoming election seasons, MMSC strove to ensure that the highest level of safety and security measures were provided for its constituents and tenants, resulting in the safety plan to aid in the city's critical infrastructure protection. In 2021, RAMP added this streamlined approach to conducting high-level assessments of physical security, fire hazards, and cybersecurity concerns at election sites.



Prior to the security upgrade, MMSC relied strictly on staff rounds to make sure areas were clear and people were safe.

With more than seven acres to cover, it was impossible to solely rely on human interaction to check the premises.

Now MMSC can be alerted in real-time if an incident takes place without having to wait for an incident report to be filed.



Video monitoring for quick response to patrons in distress

After conducting the FEMA risk assessment for voting sites, the City of Houston used this thorough process of planning, assessing, and implementing best practices when it came to security and safety at the MMSC facility for the disability community.

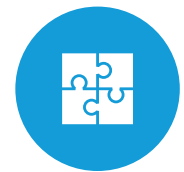
Milestone Systems was selected along with Hanwha Techwin's AI cameras to provide 24/7 video monitoring of the facility and its extensive property, including the playground, tennis courts, and other wheelchair accessible areas. A total of 23 Hanwha Wisenet P Series AI, X Series, and Q Series cameras were installed into the Milestone XProtect Expert software platform to provide video coverage of all entrances at the center as well as remote areas on the expansive property.

Hanwha's P series AI cameras were deployed in the main lobby and public spaces to provide 4K video footage as well as object detection and feature extraction, which allows for forensic search for gender, age, clothing color, bag, glasses, masks, and other characteristics. This adds an extra layer of protection in case an individual wanders into an isolated area that is not staffed.

SoundSecure provided 20 omnidirectional microphones that can pick up sound from approximately 12 feet in all directions. SoundSecure's SS-703 microphones were installed inside the facility while SS-705 microphones were used outside on the property. Combined with video input, the audio alerts staff to patron calls of distress as well as providing evidence during security events. Using one central workstation from Dell Technologies, front desk staff can easily monitor camera views and audio throughout the facility and property.

"The system can identify if somebody yells out for assistance," said Hanagriff. "This system looks and listens for anomalies that are out of the norm and then alerts the front desk. We are attempting to train the technology to attend to itself."

To meet security requirements as a polling location, the City of Houston team installed one Razberi Core Milestone recording server, which provides high-throughput video recording for 24/7 surveillance and storage. Razberi CameraDefense provides antivirus and malware protection without compromising VMS performance. Plus, Razberi EndpointDefender integration delivers automated cybersecurity and device hardening for network cameras.



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Jack C. Hanagriff,
Consultant,
Houston Smart City
Program through
the Mayor's Office of
Innovation



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Gabe Cazares,
Director,
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To protect MMSC as a polling location, a situational awareness platform from Haystack was deployed, allowing the city to share data across jurisdictions including law enforcement, fire department personnel, emergency managers, special events personnel, analysts, and more. The system provides a visual map interface, and when combined with Milestone’s open platform VMS and Dell Technologies screen technology, both public and private public safety professionals can easily leverage the technology to make important decisions. On the map, viewers can see police, fire, emergency medical service calls, road hazards, and more key resources in the area.

“Thanks to Milestone and their technology partners that have come together to help us with our security project, we have now enhanced our ability to keep eyes and ears on our facility at all times,” said Cazares.

Prior to the security upgrade, MMSC relied strictly on staff rounds to make sure areas were clear and people were safe. With more than seven acres to cover, it was impossible to solely rely on human interaction to check the premises. Now MMSC can be alerted in real-time if an incident takes place without having to wait for an incident report to be filed. Not only has there been a significant improvement in the quality of life of patrons and tenants, but the voting process can also be monitored more effectively onsite by staff and remotely by law enforcement.

City of Houston seeks to meet security best practices for smart cities

After participating in a detailed risk assessment, planning, prioritization, and response, the City of Houston was able to identify dangerous situations and be proactive rather than reactive to help mitigate risks for both election voters and the disability community at MMSC.

“Our trusted security partners have helped support our city’s expanding infrastructure and allowed us to keep the public safe in ever-changing times by implementing the latest technology seamlessly,” said Hanagriff. “We are proud to have set the standard when it comes to implementing security best practices.”

About Milestone Systems

Milestone Systems is a leading provider of open platform video management software; technology that helps the world see how to ensure safety, protect assets and increase business efficiency. Milestone enables an open platform community that drives collaboration and innovation in the development and use of network video technology, with reliable and scalable solutions that are proven in more than 500,000 installations worldwide. Founded in 1998, Milestone is a stand-alone company in the Canon Group. For more information visit: www.milestonesys.com.

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