

RESPONDING BEHIND CLOSED GATES

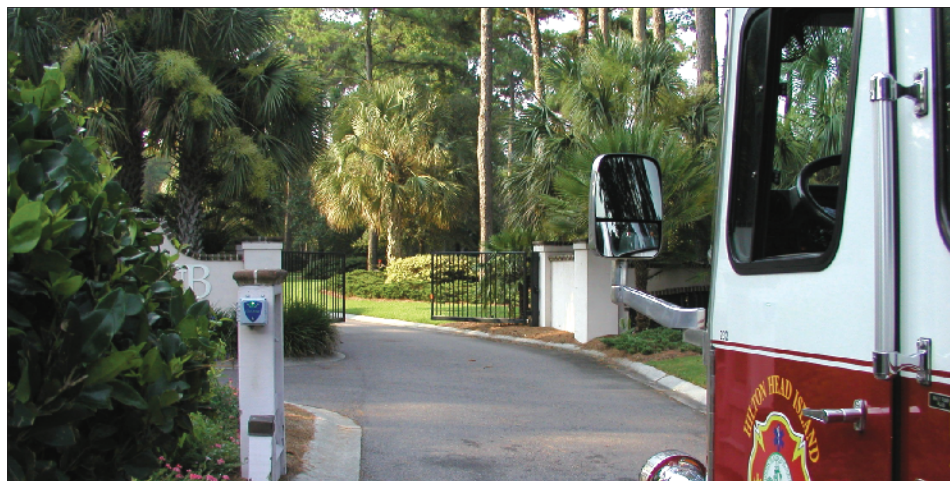
Hilton Head Island, S.C., is an internationally known vacation and resort destination that has more than 70% of its land mass "behind gates" in private communities known as plantations or planned unit developments. The Hilton Head Island Fire and Rescue Department responds to just over 6,000 calls for service annually and provides all fire, medical and transport services for the island.

Gated communities, while designed to provide safety and security to the occupants, slow response times for fire trucks, police and ambulances. These delays are critical and in some cases can be life-threatening.

In addition, where there are gated or restricted-access communities, there are generally fewer cross-street connections and therefore no ability to adequately respond to a location from multiple directions. There's also the problem of lost or malfunctioning remotes or keys, changes in community gate codes and simply no means of access for responding units. Having to call dispatch to get a gate code or contact a resident further delays response time and ties up radio frequencies.

The sheer number and size of the island's gated communities presented the department with a major challenge because most of these developments have just one gated access point. Depending on the location of the call for help, the closest fire station may not be the quickest to be able to arrive at the address, adding precious minutes to the responding-unit arrival time.

To address this problem, we met with plantation developers and property managers to explain the risk of delays caused by single-access gating. In a growing number of cases, the result has been an agreement with individual communities to create



one or more "emergency unit-only" access roads with gates around the perimeter of the development. In one case, we were able to coordinate with two adjacent communities on the creation of a single new emergency access point that connects one development with the other and greatly reduces response times for both.

With the adoption of a national standard for response times for fire and medical calls, fire departments are struggling to comply in the face of increasing requests for additional security, such as gates and fences. As fire service leaders plan future service delivery models for their community, they have a choice: either attempt to increase access by eliminating fences and gates or find a reasonable alternative to carrying a bundle of keys, garage door openers or bolt cutters.

When the department first learned about Click2Enter and what it could do, we felt that we had found a way to possibly eliminate some of these bottlenecks. We like that it maintains a printable record of all access attempts by frequency and time for documen-

tation purposes. The C2E unit attaches to any access-control system (gates, bollards, sally ports or roll-up doors) and uses our radios frequencies to gain access.

With the assigned and closely controlled emergency frequencies of a public safety agency programmed into the electronic unit, it takes only a single or double click of the responder's radio to open the gate. The unit will respond only to frequencies programmed into its database. In addition, the system can be programmed to set latch-back times that will leave gates open for a specified time after the passage of the first responder, enabling backup units to pass through even more rapidly.

Moving to an electronic system allows the department access and reduces response times. The island's residents have been tremendously supportive of departmental growth and modernization over the past two decades, and it is a natural step on our part.

— Chief Tom Fieldstead
Hilton Head Island Fire & Rescue

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