



CIVIC ALERT

User Manual

A community-based gunshot alert system

How to sign up, set up alerts, host a device,
and understand the notifications you receive.

Web • Apple • Android

Version 1.0 — Pilot Edition



Welcome to CivicAlert

CivicAlert is a community-based gunshot alert system. A network of small, privacy-preserving acoustic sensors — hosted by residents on the outside of their homes — listens for the sound of gunfire. When several nearby sensors agree that a real gunshot has occurred, the system pinpoints the approximate location and instantly alerts everyone in the surrounding area who has signed up to receive notifications.

This manual walks you through everything you need to do as a resident: creating an account, choosing how you want to be notified, marking the places you care about, optionally hosting a sensor, and understanding what to do when an alert arrives. You can use CivicAlert on the web at app.civicalert.net or through the mobile app on Apple and Android.

TIP You do not need to own a device to receive alerts.

As long as you create an account, turn on a notification method, and add at least one location, you will be alerted to nearby gunfire — whether or not you host a sensor yourself. The system relies on reports from many sensors in your area working together.

What's inside

- 1 How CivicAlert Works
- 2 Creating Your Account
- 3 Setting Up Alerts (Required)
- 4 Hosting a CivicAlert Device (Optional)
- 5 Receiving & Understanding Alerts
- 6 Logging a Missing Shot (Web Only)
- 7 Quick Reference & Support



SECTION 1

How CivicAlert Works

Understanding the basics of the system makes the rest of the app much easier to use. Here is the journey of a single gunshot, from the moment it is fired to the moment an alert reaches your phone.

1. Each device listens for gunshots

Every CivicAlert device constantly listens for loud, impulsive sounds that have a high likelihood of being a gunshot. All of this listening happens privately on the device itself — the system never records or streams continuous audio.

2. A possible shot is reported

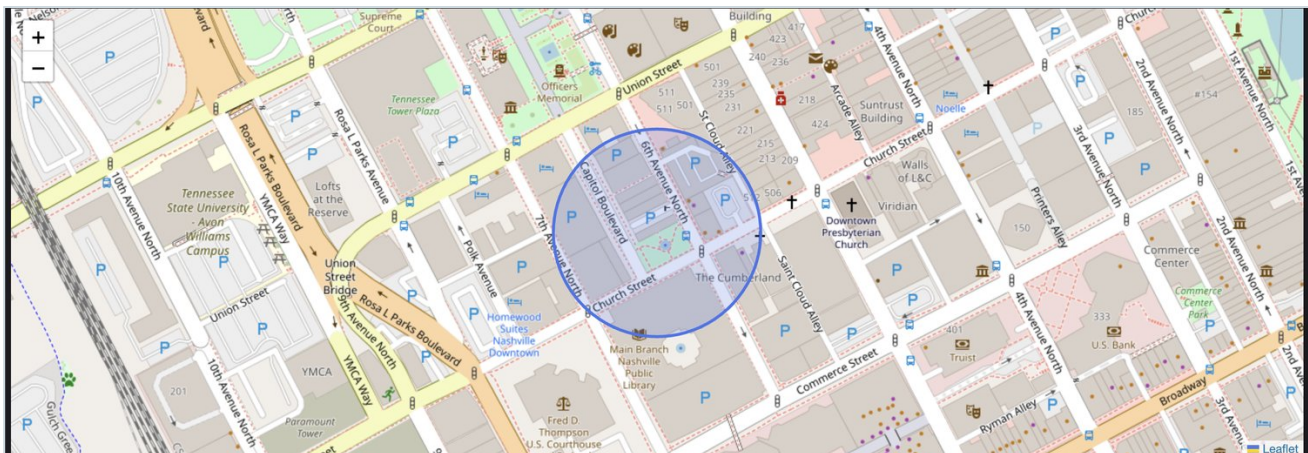
When a likely gunshot is detected, the device sends a short message to a central server. That message contains only the precise timestamp of the potential shot, the location and orientation of the sensor, and sometimes a short 2–3 second evidence clip. Nothing else is transmitted.

3. The system verifies and locates the shot

If enough sensors in a small area all report hearing the same gunshot in a consistent way, the server can confirm that a true gunshot occurred and estimate where the shooter was located. **At least three sensors** in the area must hear the shot and classify it as gunfire for an incident to be verified and located.

4. Nearby subscribers are alerted

Once verified, an alert is sent to everyone who has subscribed to receive notifications for the area where the shooting occurred. To protect privacy, the alert does **not** reveal the shooter's exact position. Instead, it shows a circle of uncertainty — roughly a block in diameter — within which the shooting most likely happened.



A verified incident shows a circle of uncertainty — roughly a block across — rather than the shooter's exact location.

**NOTE How far can one sensor hear?**

From earlier testing, a single sensor reliably covers roughly **750–1,000 feet**. Real-world range varies a lot depending on where the sensor is placed and how much background noise is present when a shot is fired. Because at least three sensors must agree, good coverage depends on having enough devices hosted across the neighborhood.

Where the system works

Anyone may sign up for an account and receive alerts. However, device hosting is currently limited to the immediate **NACA (North Austin Civic Association)** area. As a result, the system is only useful within the NACA area — and specifically in places where there is enough sensor coverage for three or more sensors to detect a shot.

Your privacy

- Audio is processed **locally on each device**. Data is transmitted only when a gunshot is positively detected.
- A transmitted packet contains just a short, encrypted evidence clip, the detection time, and the device's GPS location — never personally identifiable information.
- There is **no continuous recording** and no way to remotely log into a device or monitor its audio.
- Data travels over a dedicated, encrypted cellular channel that cannot carry voice, texts, or ordinary internet traffic.
- Law enforcement can see higher-accuracy locations but cannot see who owns a device or tie any person to an incident, unless you choose to report it yourself.



SECTION 2

Creating Your Account

Signing up for an account is free and open to the public. You can create an account — and later sign in — using either a simple email-and-password combination or one of the supported social logins (Google, Apple, or Amazon). All user accounts are completely free to use.

To create an account

1. Open the app on your phone, or go to **app.civicalert.net** in a web browser.
2. On the sign-in screen, tap **Sign Up**.
3. On the Sign Up screen, choose how to register: either enter an email address and password and tap **Submit**, or tap one of the social sign-up links — **Sign up with Google**, **Amazon**, or **Apple**. Signing up with a social account means you won't need to create or remember a password.
4. Either way, you'll verify your email address: check your inbox for a **6-digit verification code** from **support@civicalert.net**, enter it on the **Verify Email** screen, and tap **Submit** to finish.

The Sign Up screen — register with email and a password, or with a Google, Amazon, or Apple account.



Every new account verifies an email address by entering the 6-digit code sent from support@civicalert.net.

Signing in later with a different method

You can link multiple sign-in methods to the same account. If you create your account one way (for example, with email) and later try to sign in a different way (for example, a social login), you'll be asked to complete a one-time verification of that new method. After that, you can sign in using any method you have verified.

NOTE Forgot your password?

On the sign-in screen, tap **Forgot Password?** and follow the prompts to reset it by email.

Choosing your preferred distance units

After creating an account, you can choose whether the app shows distances in imperial or metric units. From the Home screen, tap **My Account**, and on the **Settings** tab set **Preferred Units**:

- **Imperial (mi, ft)** — distances appear in feet, switching to miles for longer distances. This is the default for new accounts.
- **Metric (km, m)** — distances appear in meters, switching to kilometers for longer distances.

This setting affects how distances are shown throughout the app — most noticeably the radius around each of your locations (see Section 3).



SECTION 3

Setting Up Alerts (Required)

To receive gunshot alerts, you must complete **two** quick setup steps. Until both are done, you won't receive any notifications — and the app's Home screen will show a red warning banner reminding you of whatever is still missing. Tapping a banner takes you straight to the setting that needs attention.

IMPORTANT The two required steps

1. **Choose how you want to be notified** — turn on push, email, and/or text alerts.
2. **Add at least one location** — mark the place(s) you want to be alerted about.

Step 1 — Choose how you're notified

By default, all notifications are turned **off**. You must opt in to whichever alert methods you want. To open your notification settings:

1. From the Home screen, tap **My Account**.
2. On the **Settings** tab, tap **Open Notification Settings**. (You can also tap the Home-screen warning banner about notification methods.)
3. Turn on any combination of **Push Notification**, **Email**, and **Text Message**.
4. Tap **I Agree** to save your choices.

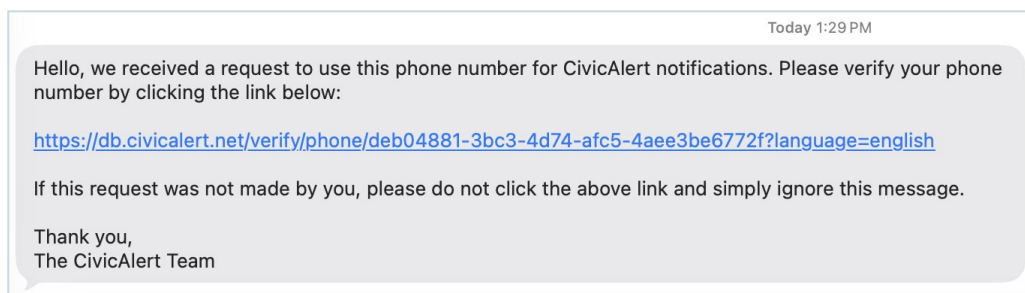
Notification Settings — switch on Push Notification, Email, and/or Text Message, then tap I Agree.



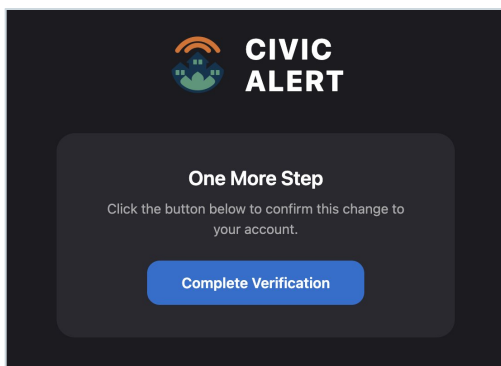
Turning on text (SMS) alerts

Text alerts need a verified phone number before they can be switched on:

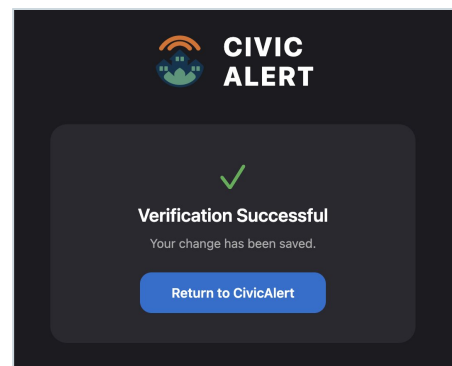
1. In Notification Settings, enter your **phone number including area code** in the Text Message field.
2. Review the text-message consent terms shown beneath the field: *"If you choose to receive incident alerts by text, we will send you one text per detected incident. Message and data rates may apply. To stop receiving text messages, deselect this option or reply STOP to opt out. Reply HELP for help."*
3. Once a correctly formatted number is entered, turn on the **Text Message** toggle.
4. Tap **I Agree** to save. You'll then be sent a verification link/message that you must confirm before your number takes effect and text alerts begin.
5. To stop text alerts later, simply switch the Text Message toggle back off (or reply STOP to a CivicAlert text).



After you save, a verification text arrives from (775) 922-4842 with a confirmation link.



Tap the link, then Complete Verification.



Once confirmed, your text alerts are active.

Step 2 — Add a location to monitor

A **location** marks an important place you want to keep an eye on — your home, a workplace, or a child's school — along with a radius around it. You'll be alerted any time a gunshot is detected within the radius of one of your locations. You can add as many locations as you like.

1. From the Home screen, tap **My Account**, then open the **Locations** tab.
2. Under **Add New Location**, follow the three-step wizard below.

The location wizard has three steps:



Set Location

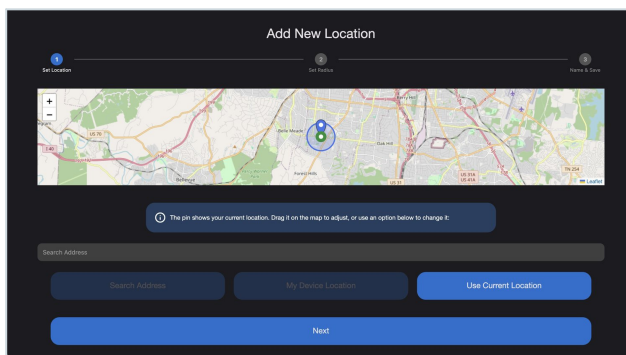
The map opens centered on your current location. Drag the pin to fine-tune it, search for an address, tap **Use Current Location**, or tap **My Device Location** if you host a device.

Set Radius

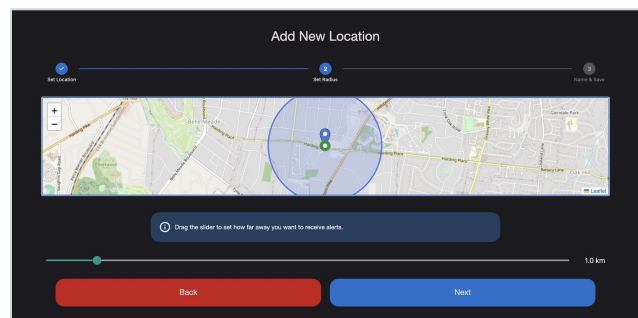
Drag the slider to choose how far from this spot you want to receive alerts. The radius ranges from a tight circle right around the spot up to one large enough to cover essentially the entire NACA area. The distance is shown in your preferred units — feet/miles or meters/kilometers (see *Choosing your preferred distance units* in Section 2).

Name & Save

Give the location a name you'll recognize — such as "Home" or "Work" — and tap **Save**.



Step 1 — Set Location



Step 2 — Set Radius

TIP Not sure what radius to pick?

The default radius (1 km, or roughly 3,281 feet) around your chosen spot is a good starting point — it alerts you to gunfire within a few blocks in any direction of your home. You can always adjust it later by opening the location from the Locations tab.



SECTION 4

Hosting a CivicAlert Device (Optional)

Hosting a sensor is **not** required to receive alerts — but every device added to the neighborhood improves coverage and accuracy for everyone. The more sensors in an area, the more reliably the system can verify and locate gunfire.

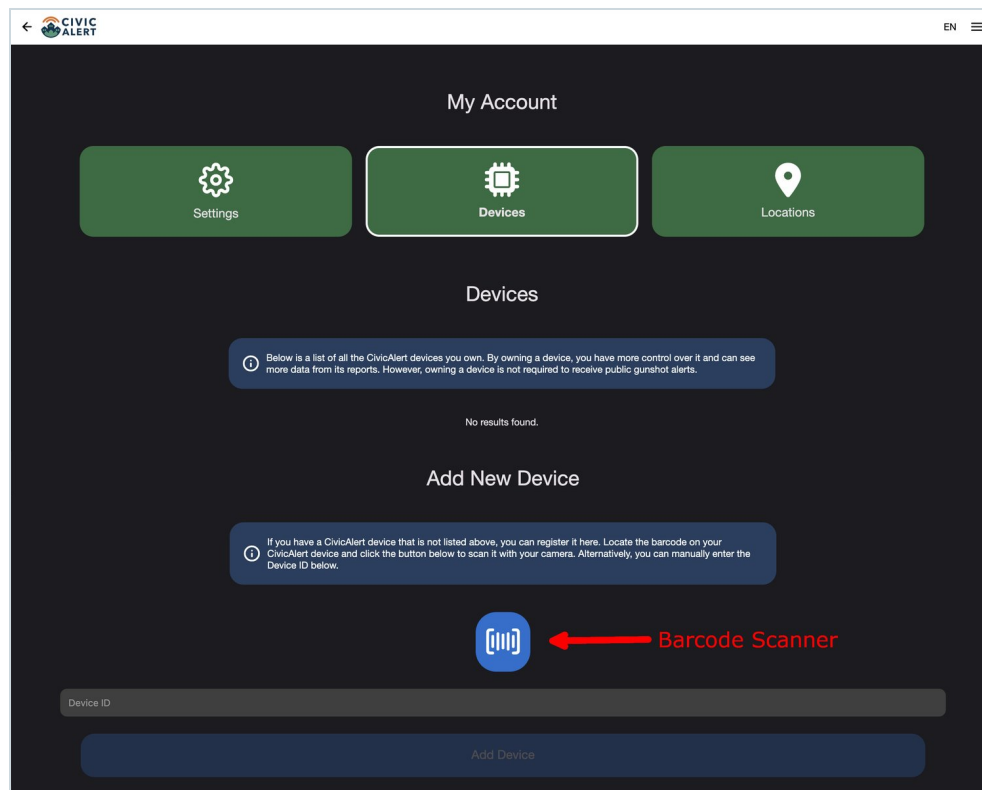
Getting a device

Devices are provided through NACA. To request one, email info@naca-austin.org. There is no cost to host a device during the pilot.

Adding the device to your account

It's easiest to link the device to your account first — you can do this before you even plug it in, using the sticker on the side of the device:

1. From the Home screen, tap **My Account**, then open the **Devices** tab.
2. Scroll to the **Add New Device** section.
3. Tap the barcode-scanner button and point your camera at the barcode on the sticker on the side of your device — *or* type the **Device ID** from that same sticker into the field.
4. Tap **Add Device**. The device will then appear in your Devices list.



My Account → Devices tab: tap the barcode-scanner button in the Add New Device section, or type the Device ID.

Installing your device

Physical setup is simple: plug the provided USB-C cable into the bottom of the CivicAlert device and into a standard wall outlet. Where and how you place it, however, matters a great deal for it to work correctly.

Placement rules

- **Mount it outside** — on a porch, patio, the side of the house, a covered eave, or anywhere with a clear view of the surrounding area.
- **Never install it indoors**, not even inside a window facing outward. Walls and glass muffle and distort the sound of a gunshot enough that the device won't detect it.
- **Keep a clear view of the sky.** The device needs a GPS lock to determine its precise position and the current time — both required to locate gunfire.
- **Face the logo outward.** The microphones are on the side of the device with the CivicAlert logo; that side must face horizontally away from your home. If the logo faces down, the ground will muffle the sound; if it faces up, rain can get into the microphones and damage the electronics.
- **Keep the USB plug on the bottom.** The device is designed to be plugged in with the USB-C cable entering its bottom edge — keep it oriented this way.
- **Avoid constant direct sunlight.** The internal electronics are similar to a cell phone's and can be sensitive to overheating. Do your best — we understand outlet placement isn't always ideal.

**IMPORTANT Quick placement check**

Outside • clear view of the sky • logo facing outward • USB plug on the bottom • out of constant direct sun.



A correctly installed device: mounted outdoors, logo/microphone side facing outward, with the USB-C cable entering the bottom.

NOTE Devices and alerts are independent.

A device can belong to only one account, but that has no effect on who gets alerted. Alerts are driven entirely by your **locations** — so you'll be notified of nearby gunfire even if you host no device at all, and even when your own device isn't the one that heard the shot.



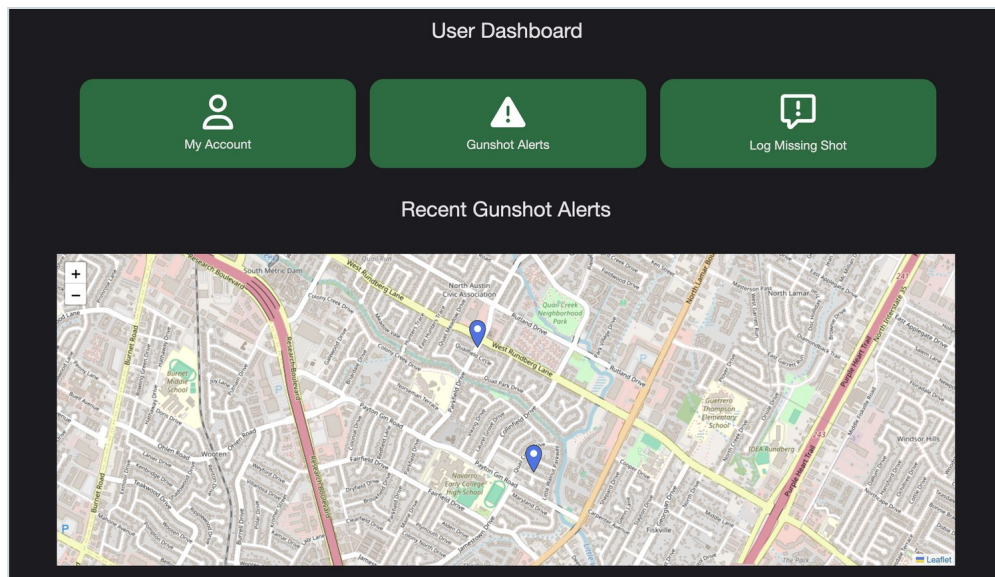
SECTION 5

Receiving & Understanding Alerts

When a gunshot is verified near one of your locations, CivicAlert sends an alert through each method you turned on. Alerts always come from these official contacts:

- Email alerts come from **alerts@civicalert.net**.
- Text alerts come from **(775) 922-4842** — that's 775-92-CIVIC.

You can also review past alerts at any time. From the Home screen, the **Recent Gunshot Alerts** map shows activity from the last seven days, and tapping **Gunshot Alerts** opens the full history. Tap any entry to open its **Alert Details**.



The Home dashboard — the Recent Gunshot Alerts map shows activity from the last seven days. Tap a pin to open its alert.

Reading an alert

Opening an alert shows the **Alert Details** screen. Here's what you'll find and what the terms mean (these are the same labels you'll see in the app):

- **Map** — at the top, a circle showing the approximate area (about a block across) where the shot most likely occurred.
- **Alert ID** — a unique number for this event. Keep it handy; police can use it to cross-reference your report.
- **Timestamp** — when the alert was detected.
- **Shot Count** — how many shots the system estimates were fired.
- **"Is this a Gunshot?"** — thumbs-up / thumbs-down buttons for you to give feedback on the alert.



- **Location** — the nearest street address to the alert, along with its latitude and longitude.
- **Evidence** — a section listing the clips captured by nearby sensors. Each row shows the **Sensor ID**, a **Clip** you can play, and a **Vote** control for that individual clip.

Alert Details

Field	Value
Alert ID	129
Timestamp	6/21/2026, 11:03:25 AM
Shot Count	1
Is this a Gunshot?	☐ ☒
Location	Near 906, Kirschner Place, Austin, Travis County, Texas, 78758, United States (30.360271, -97.703056)

Evidence

Sensor ID	Clip	Vote
353760970490555		☐ ☒
353760970074227		☐ ☒
353760970055085		☐ ☒
353760970056612		☐ ☒
353760970056752		☐ ☒
353760970056158		☐ ☒

The Alert Details screen: the circle of uncertainty on the map, the details table, and the evidence clips you can play and vote on.

What to do when you receive an alert

1. **Review the alert details** as soon as the alert arrives.
2. **Listen to the evidence clip** — this is an important step in judging the alert for yourself.
3. **Vote.** Use the "Is this a Gunshot?" buttons. If it's an obvious false alarm — a firework or a car backfiring — and you're sure, vote it down. Your feedback helps improve the system.
4. **Stay safe.** If the alert is near you and appears to be a real gunshot, take cover if needed.
5. **Report it to 911** when it's safe and appropriate to do so.

**IMPORTANT Reporting to police — call 911**

CivicAlert supports your decision to report; it does not automatically dispatch police. When you're satisfied an alert is a real gunshot, please call it in to **911**.

The Alert Details screen includes a **Reporting** section. Choosing the phone option opens a **call script** that helps you give the dispatcher the right information — including the Alert ID — and you can also report by email or text where available.



SECTION 6

Logging a Missing Shot (Web Only)

If you hear a gunshot that CivicAlert did **not** alert you about, you can log it yourself so the system has a record of it and nearby users can be notified. Your report is corroborated against our sensors and may be sent out as an anonymous alert to other users, and you'll also be given the option to report it to local law enforcement.

IMPORTANT Only use this for a genuinely missed shot.

The "Log Missing Shot" functionality is meant for one situation: you heard a real gunshot that the system did not detect. There's no need to log a shot the system already alerted you about.

This feature is available on the **web app only** (app.civicalert.net) — it does not appear in the Apple or Android apps.

How to log a missing shot

1. From the Home screen on the web app, tap **Log Missing Shot**.
2. Set the **Approx Time** you heard the shot (from *Now* up to *1 hour ago*).
3. Choose the **Shot Count** (the number of shots, or *Unknown*).
4. Optionally add a **Comment**, and tick **Allow Followup Contact** if you're willing to be contacted by responding officers.
5. Set the location: drag the marker on the map to where you were when you heard the shot, or search for an address.
6. Tick **I certify this information is true and correct...**, then tap **Report**.

After you submit, you can optionally report the shot to local law enforcement using the same reporting options described in Section 5.



SECTION 7

Quick Reference & Support

Glossary of in-app terms

Term	What it means
Alert / Incident	A gunshot the system has verified by combining reports from multiple nearby sensors.
Alert ID	The unique number identifying an alert; useful when reporting to police.
Sensor Report	A single device's report of a possible gunshot (raw, before verification).
Log Missing Shot	A web-only feature for logging a gunshot you heard that the system did not detect.
Location	A place you've pinned, plus a radius, that defines where you want to be alerted.
Device	A CivicAlert acoustic sensor hosted at a home.
Evidence	Short clips captured by nearby sensors, attached to an alert, that you can play — each with its own Sensor ID and Vote control.
Preferred Distance Units	Your choice of imperial (ft, mi) or metric (m, km) for how distances are displayed; set in account Settings.
Circle of Uncertainty	The approximate area (about a block wide) where a shot most likely occurred.

Getting help

Technical support support@civicalert.net

General questions info@civicalert.net

Request a device (NACA) info@naca-austin.org

Email alerts come from alerts@civicalert.net

Text alerts come from (775) 922-4842 (775-92-CIVIC)

Web app app.civicalert.net

Learn more www.civicalert.net



Good to know

- CivicAlert is a Vanderbilt University and NSF-sponsored research pilot, run in partnership with NACA. Participation is free.
- The system supports community-initiated reporting; it does not increase police presence or auto-dispatch officers.
- Resident reporting — including your thumbs-up / thumbs-down feedback on alerts — is an important part of improving the system's accuracy and reliability over the course of the pilot.

For full terms, see the **Terms of Service** and **Privacy Policy** at www.civicalert.net. This manual covers the resident (user) experience of the CivicAlert app on web, Apple, and Android.