



TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON JULY 22, 2013
FROM:	VERONICA MCALEA MAJOR MANAGING DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SERVICES AND CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER
SUBJECT:	PUBLIC NOTIFICATION SYSTEM AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR EMERGENCIES

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Corporate Services and Chief Human Resources Officer Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to develop a request for proposal to purchase a public notification system.

BACKGROUND

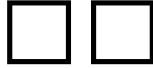
This Report is being provided in response to Council's request for information regarding the Corporation's communication plans and options for informing and contacting members of the public during an emergency event.

Communication is a critical component for the successful management of any emergency situation. Under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (O. Reg. Section 380/04, s.15), every municipality shall designate an employee of the municipality as its Emergency Information Officer and that officer shall act as the primary media and public contact for the municipality in an emergency. The Director, Communications has been designated as the Corporation's Emergency Information Officer and is responsible for developing a comprehensive communications plan.

EXISTING NOTIFICATION METHODS

The current communications plan (attached as Appendix "A") sets out a variety of options the Corporation can utilize to inform the public before or during an emergency situation as summarized below:

- *Media advisories and releases* – can be used when an incident has already occurred or is about to occur. This form of information is typically distributed by email and fax.
- *Web page updates* – the main city web page will provide a link to the current media releases and status reports as well as alerts related to any ongoing incident.
- *Team London* – updates will be posted on Team London to provide information on any incident. The updates will also include links to internal information and are intended to ensure consistent information to internal users across the Corporation.
- *Facebook postings* – the Corporation's Facebook account is also used to post information on a proactive and reactive basis. Citizens will be able to ask questions or post information.
- *Twitter* – the Communications Division uses Twitter to issue information and communicate with the public. Other Twitter users can easily "retweet" these messages to their contacts. By monitoring Twitter, it is possible to get information on the community impacts of emergencies. Most media outlets use Twitter extensively and post photos and videos on their web sites as breaking news happens.
- *RSS Feeds* -- Really Simple Syndication (RSS) sends all news to one place. RSS feeds are pulled together through a web-based reader or through desktop software. The Communications Division offers an RSS feed of media releases.



- *Automated Telephone Greetings* – greetings on the main Corporate customer service phone lines can be changed to provide updates on any emergency incident.
- *Public Information Centre* – a call centre can be readily set up to take calls from the community. The PIC Manager works closely with the Emergency Management and Communications Divisions to build a status board and contact database to be able to answer calls accurately.
- Emergency Management Ontario Red Alert - EMO has introduced a subscription-based, province-wide alerting system using a wide range of communications vehicles including email, RSS, and SMS messages. Some situations for which a Red Alert may be issued include: large fire or explosion; chemical leak or spill; nuclear emergency; extreme weather events; or a transportation accident. The Community Emergency Management Coordinator can request a Red Alert through the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre. If the Corporation's request meets the criteria, an alert will be issued usually within 15 to 30 minutes province-wide.

ALTERNATIVE NOTIFICATION METHODS

There are additional communication options that could augment the current ability of the Corporation to communicate with the public during an emergency event.

A. Computerized Notification Systems

Some businesses, colleges, universities, hospitals and government organizations are using computerized notification systems. Depending on the software, platform, database, and number of telephone lines utilized, these notification systems can deliver phone messages to office, home and mobile numbers based on pre-determined scenarios and time/day parameters. These systems can leave messages on answering machines and some are also capable of delivering text and Blackberry PIN messages. These systems can be used for both widespread public alerting purposes as well as smaller scale notifications such as emergency/crisis response teams, staff call-ins, alerting the Community Control Group, or after hours notifications.

To fully benefit from these systems a rapid triggering process needs to be in place. That process requires that once a threat is identified there must be clearly defined procedures and dedicated staff to trigger alerts (24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year). The process also needs to ensure warnings are done in a timely fashion and updates are provided on a regular basis having regard to the situation.

There are two major components to computerized notification systems; the hardware and software system used to deliver the message and the database used to contact the recipients.

Hardware/Software Options:

There are primarily two options:

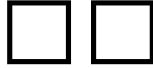
1. Third Party Hosted/Subscription Services
2. Purchased In House System

There are advantages and disadvantages to each type of system. Hosted systems usually involve initial setup costs, yearly subscription costs, and a cost per message/call/minute when used. Purchased systems involve initial purchase and yearly maintenance agreements.

For mass notification purposes, any system must be able to process a large number of calls or messages at the same time. This can require a large number of phone and data lines. Some hosted systems are located outside of Canada and that may become a concern for a widespread event since communications in and out of the country may be restricted to ensure capacity is available domestically.

Database Options:

The biggest challenge for a public notification system is developing and maintaining a data base. When an organization already has an employee or customer database, this is a simple process as the data entry can be automated. In other cases, the data must be entered and maintained manually. Some systems have a process built-in when it will call users to confirm their contact information is still valid.



1. Bell Canada - Enhanced Community Notification Service (eCNS)

The 911 database is maintained by Bell Canada and its use is *regulated by the Canadian Radio Television Commission under General Tariff Item 1375*. The Enhanced Community Notification Service (eCNS) allows a registered Public Safety Answering Point Authorized Administrator to access a web site to download a database that contains residential phone numbers, municipal street addresses, and latitude/longitude coordinates. This file would then have to be uploaded to dialling and/or mapping systems. All data must be immediately deleted once the CNS Alert related to the specific emergency has been completed.

Access to the database is limited to an emergency where there is “an imminent or unfolding danger that threatens the life, health or security of an individual”. The database includes a list of residential wire line and fixed VoIP subscribers contained in the provincial 9-1-1 database but it does not include wireless, nomadic VoIP subscribers, four party lines. Finally, in order to be able to utilize the database, the Corporation would have to provide prior notification to all subscribers through all carriers via a bill insert 3 months prior to implementation.

2. Subscription Based utilizing Self-Registration

Some communities have implemented systems that utilize a self-registration process, either via a web-based or paper registration process. The municipality of Quinte-West developed the PRISM-911 (Protective Response Interactive Services Management) as one component part of its Emergency Management Software system. Huron County and Goderich have also purchased this system. While these types of system allow for the provision of all modes of communications (home, office, cellular, email, fax), they normally have a small percentage of community participation and can need a high level of maintenance if there is no automated update process.

B. Dedicated Alerting Devices

A unique project was unveiled in the Sarnia/Port Huron area. St. Clair Township, St. Clair County Michigan and FM radio broadcasters on both sides of the boarder implemented the Bluewater Community Alerting Network. Emergency information is delivered via the data subcarrier of existing FM radio stations to specifically designed receivers. These receivers are available for a \$10 refundable deposit.

C. Sirens

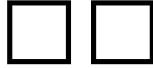
Outdoor sirens are one of the most basic systems dating back to the Cold War era. The Department of National Defence (Canadian Forces) removed Air Raid sirens in the 1970's due to high maintenance costs and false alarms. However, the public still asks about sirens as a warning device. Sarnia is one of the few Ontario cities to have an active siren program, mainly because of the risk of chemical emergencies. Often, siren systems used for more than one type of warning can cause confusion and undesirable responses. They are expensive to install over a wide area and have trouble penetrating in today's environment of air conditioning and various forms of loud entertainment systems. They are still utilized heavily in the US tornado-prone areas but citizen complacency, even when warned by sirens, is a major obstacle to their effectiveness.

D. Weather Alerts

Environment Canada is responsible for issuing weather alerts. These bulletins are emailed and faxed out to public safety organizations as well as the media. Local media broadcast the weather alerts out to their listeners/viewers as well as place them on their Facebook and Twitter. In most cases, satisfactory advanced warning is usually available on approaching severe weather through the following levels of alerts:

- Special Weather Statement/Advisories – gives early notice that conditions are favourable for the development of hazardous weather conditions – Be Weather Alert.
- Watches – severe weather is possible in the near future – be alert and ready to take safety actions.
- Warnings – severe weather is imminent or occurring – take immediate precautions.

In addition to weather alerts, Citizens can also increase their preparedness by purchasing a Weatheradio (<http://www.ec.gc.ca/meteo-weather/default.asp?lang=En&n=792F2D20-1>) or by subscribing to free weather alert emails or mobile applications through The Weather Network. (http://www.theweathernetwork.com/weatherapps/?ref=topnav_downloads_weatherapps)



Summary

The provision of timely and accurate information to the public is critical to the management of any emergency situation. Public Notification Systems can enhance the ability of an organization to get the necessary information to the public. Municipalities such as the Region of Halton have recently implemented a notification system and several other municipalities are in the process of developing similar systems.

Having reviewed the various options for a public notification system, Civic Administration recommends that the Corporation pursue a request for proposals for the purchase of a computerized notification system utilizing Bell Canada’s database (Option A). This option will allow for notification during multiple types of emergency situations and assist with business continuity as it has the capacity for staff call outs and other notifications to the public. It is estimated that the implementation costs of this option would be approximately \$100,000 and annual operating costs would be approximately \$50,000. Not factored into these costs are the human resources that would need to be devoted to implementing the project. The implementation costs associated to the system can be covered in the existing Emergency Management capital budget. Ongoing operating costs will require an increase in the Emergency Management operating budget. Upon completion of the purchasing process a report outlining the full costs of implementation will be submitted back to Council for approval prior to any final decision to purchase a notification system.

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Attach: Appendix “A”