



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

May 26, 2015

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Christine Daniel, City Manager

Submitted by: Gil Dong, Fire Chief

Subject: Emergency Public Information and Warning Update

SUMMARY

Staff continues to develop the City's Emergency Public Information and Warning (EPIW) program. The City has transitioned the Berkeley Emergency Notification System (BENS) to a new vendor platform, which included staff training and a new signup website. The City is now instructing TTY/TDD users to sign their devices up with BENS in order to receive BENS alerts on those devices. Staff is also coordinating with Alameda County to establish the countywide Mass Notification System (MNS).

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

New BENS Platform

On April 1, the City transitioned to a new vendor platform for BENS. Since June 2004, the City has contracted with FirstCall Network to operate BENS. In December 2014, FirstCall was wholly purchased by Emergency Communications Network (ECN). Since that time, City staff has worked with ECN to transition BENS to the ECN platform. This transition involved staff training, data migration and a new community signup website, which is available through www.CityofBerkeley.info/BENS.

The FirstCall-ECN transition will not substantively affect community members' experience with BENS. Community members who have already subscribed to BENS will continue to be subscribed to the system. Like FirstCall, ECN is prohibited from sharing or selling subscriber information. New subscribers will use a new community signup webpage, and their data will be integrated into the existing database.

The City plans to maintain the ECN platform through the end of the contract period on July 31, 2015, at which point the City plans to fully transition to the countywide MNS (see *Countywide MNS Procurement* below).

TTY/TDD Signup Requirement

Some individuals who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing use TTY/TDDs (teletypewriter/telecommunication device for people who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing) to send and receive messages in text format over a land line phone. In the past, the City

advised TTY/TDD users that they were automatically subscribed to receive BENS messages in the appropriate format. To ensure that TTY/TDD users receive BENS messages in the appropriate format, the City is now instructing TTY/TDD users to sign up their TTY/TDD devices for BENS, either on the BENS website (www.CityofBerkeley.info/BENS) or by contacting the Office of Emergency Services at (510) 981-3473 or (510) 981-5544 (TTY/TDD). These new instructions are the result of system testing and consultation with emergency notification system vendors.

Office of Emergency Services staff is educating community members about these new instructions. City staff is collaborating with the Berkeley Emergency Accessible Community Organizations Network (BEACON) and the Ed Roberts campus to communicate this information to community members who are Deaf/hard-of-hearing. Staff also presented this new information to the Commission on Disability and the Commission on Aging.

Countywide MNS Procurement

Office of Emergency Services staff provided subject matter expert guidance to Alameda County on development of the countywide emergency notification system for joint use by the County and its cities. Staff participated on the County's vendor evaluation committee for countywide MNS procurement. On April 7, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors approved the County's contract with Everbridge to provide the countywide MNS. Everbridge has extensive experience with joint City-County MNSs across the United States. The countywide system is expected to be online before July 2015.

Countywide Policies and Protocols

Currently, OES staff is representing Berkeley on the MNS Steering Committee, which is establishing joint policies for appropriate and coordinated use of the countywide MNS. Coordinated notification protocols will help to ensure that officials across the county deliver consistent information and instructions to the community during emergencies. This planning process will include refinements to coordination protocols with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) for situations involving potentially-hazardous pollutants.

Integrated Public Alert and Warning System

Participation in the countywide MNS will provide the City with access to the federal Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS). This new alerting technology enables emergency managers to send wireless emergency alerts to mobile phones based on a device's real-time location, and does not require signup. IPAWS is not currently available to individual cities. The California Highway Patrol uses IPAWS to send Amber Alerts, and the National Weather Service uses IPAWS to send hazardous weather information. Once Alameda County has received federal approval for IPAWS access, the feature will be available to the City through the countywide MNS.

BACKGROUND

During the August 6, 2012 Chevron Refinery Fire in Richmond, messaging to communities in Alameda County was inconsistent. Some jurisdictions in Alameda County activated their emergency notification systems. City of Berkeley emergency managers monitored the situation and determined that the smoke did not pose a threat to the Berkeley community, and the City did not activate its emergency notification systems.

In 2013, the Alameda County Civil Grand Jury recommended that the County take the lead in developing a countywide MNS.

City Council History

At its meeting on October 30, 2012, City Council requested the Community Environmental Advisory Commission (CEAC) and the Community Health Commission (CHC) to research the City's and BAAQMD's response to the Chevron Refinery Fire.

At its meeting on December 17, 2013, Council moved to request the City Manager to direct the City's existing Emergency Public Information and Warning Steering Committee to:

1. Coordinate with the Alameda County Operational Area to optimize information sharing during emergency events.
2. Coordinate with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) to clarify the District's roles and responsibilities for monitoring air quality and sharing information during emergency events.
3. Further develop community outreach about the capabilities and limitations of the City's emergency public information and warning systems, and the interdepartmental coordination and procedures guiding their use.

Council also referred the item to the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission and requested the City Manager to direct staff to coordinate with Contra Costa County.

At the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission meeting on September 24, 2014, staff informed the Commission about the City's coordination with Alameda County and BAAQMD, as well as emergency public information and warning systems outreach.

In a staff presentation on emergency management at the Special Meeting of the City Council on October 21, 2014, staff committed to updating Council on the status of EPIW efforts in May 2015.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The coordination with Alameda County and refinement of protocols described in this report will not directly impact air quality in Berkeley. However, these efforts may help to protect people living in Berkeley from exposure to potentially-hazardous pollutants

during emergency events. The actions outlined in this report are consistent with the City's environmental sustainability goals.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

If the countywide MNS effectively supports Berkeley's emergency notification needs, and if the County cannot secure grant funding to pay for the service in future years, staff may request Council approval to fund Berkeley's participation in the countywide system.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Current annual fees for the BENS system are \$25,314. The City's current BENS contract expires on July 31, 2015.

Alameda County will use grant funding to pay for the countywide MNS through May 31, 2016. If the countywide MNS effectively supports Berkeley's emergency notification needs, and if the County cannot secure grant funding to pay for the system in future years, the City may need to fund Berkeley's participation in the countywide system.

Staff is representing Berkeley in negotiations to establish a cost-sharing structure for countywide MNS participants. While Berkeley's exact portion of the annual countywide MNS cost has not yet been determined, staff anticipates that it will be equal to or less than the City's current annual BENS contract fee.

CONTACT PERSON

Dave Brannigan, Assistant Chief of Special Operations, Fire Department, 981-5508
Sarah Lana, Emergency Services Coordinator, Fire Department, 981-5576