

Description of Lane Area Community Emergency Notification System (CENS) and Announcement of a New Feature for Cell and Voice Over Internet Subscribers Called “Alert Me”

June 16, 2011

Community Emergency Notification System (CENS) for Lane County Area

CENS is a county-wide system funded and used by Lane area public safety agencies to quickly and safely alert people in areas threatened by natural or manmade emergencies. The system calls residents of a targeted area to provide an alert with specific emergency instructions such as whether to shelter in-place, to listen for reports on TV/radio, or to evacuate. It can send up to 2,000 calls per minute with a pre-recorded message providing detailed instructions to those in harms way.

“Alert Me” service for Cell phone and Voice over Internet Subscribers

Public Safety Agencies in Lane County are now expanding the capabilities of CENS to provide messaging (voice and/or text) to wire-less (cellular) and those using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) as well as traditional wire-line devices allowing them to register an address to be notified at a web-site. We are calling this service **“Alert Me”**. The Alert Me website will allow citizens to register up to five devices to a specific address. If an emergency event requiring activation of CENS should occur, wire-line, wire-less and VoIP devices listed with an address in the area of notification will now receive the emergency message (voice and/or text). Please recognize the notification location will be based on the registered address and **not** the location of the device (cell phone) at time of incident.

CENS and this added service are intended to supplement, not replace information citizens receive from television, radio and other sources. Further, it should not replace individual and family emergency planning not to mention that there may be situations where direct communication from the CENS is simply not possible.

CENS Background

CENS is a telephone based alerting system that augments traditional public notification methods by quickly directing emergency alerts to threatened areas. It is also capable of calling prepared lists of numbers and delivering a recorded message. A two-way Call List module was added October 2007 that allows two-way messaging of prepared lists such as for First Responders.

CENS was developed through a partnership of public agencies. After successful testing, CENS became operational in Lane County in December 1999, the first of its kind in the country. Since its inception CENS has sent thousands of messages to those in harms way. Activation of the system for incidents such as hostage situations, evacuations due to wildfire, floods, hazardous material spills, and alerts to shelter in place and report dangerous suspects at-large.

Through a Partnership coordinated by Lane Council of Governments, funding is provided by the cities of Eugene, Springfield, Florence and Cottage Grove, Lane County Sheriff’s Office, Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue, Western Lane Ambulance District and West Lane Emergency Operations Group. Annual 2011 cost is estimated at \$65,000. The current partnership

agreement identifies funding commitments for three years which will expire December 31, 2011. Before CENS, agencies had to rely on audible warnings like sirens, which cannot give instructions, and door-to-door attempts to contact people. GIS based alerts can be pre-planned (i.e. flood/tsunami inundation areas) or dynamic (i.e. dangerous at-large suspect). The same high volume/speed messaging can be used for call lists (i.e. call in emergency personnel).

Potential Emergencies & Activation

Areas can be pre-designated such as flood plains, hazardous material storage sites and tsunami inundation areas, or can be identified on short notice such as in the case of a terrorist attack or urban fire-storm. Imminent threats of dam failure; barricaded or armed suspect in a neighborhood; a hazardous material spill; even a homeland security alert regarding an imminent act of terror; these are all potential emergencies when CENS may be used.

In the event of an emergency or disaster, an authorized public safety official will designate the area to be alerted and initiate an appropriate message. The Central Lane Communications (9-1-1) Center is used as the launch site. Partners can also request activation of the call-list function for their personnel during emergencies. Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) develops the database required for predetermined alert areas.