

Emergency Telephone Notification System

Franklin County Emergency Management & Homeland Security Twenty First Century Communications

The emergency telephone notification system employed by the City of Columbus, the Ohio State University and Franklin County debuted on Tuesday, October 4, 2005 and proved to be very successful in the opinion of Art Baker, Emergency Manager for Warning at Franklin County Emergency Management & Homeland Security (FCEM&HS). “We were more than pleased with the results of this exercise. We called over 37,000 residences and businesses in the Franklin County area and reached over 80% with our message. The remaining 20% were either busy signals or no one answered. If the system reached an answering machine a message was left. All in all, it performed exactly as expected. Now, we’re ready to move into the next phase of our plan,” stated Baker.

Phase Two involves the establishment of a page on the Franklin County EM& HS web site that will allow residents who only have cell phones or unlisted numbers to sign up for emergency calls. “This is important because so many people have unlisted home phone numbers or use their cell phones for personal home use instead of the more traditional land-line phone service. In these cases, we have no way of reaching these people unless they register their phone numbers with us. That’s why we’ve created this secure registration web site,” Baker said.

Residents interested in adding their information to the Franklin County EM&HS database should log on to www.emafc.com beginning today. “The simple form can be easily completed in a few minutes and citizens can be assured of the complete confidentiality of the information. It will only be used by the Franklin County EM&HS or other government agency which has partnered in the service in case of an emergency,” Baker concluded. Persons without Internet service may call the Franklin County EMA at 614-794-0213 and add their information over the phone.

The Universal Communications System (UCS) used in the exercise on October 4 was developed by a Columbus-based company, Twenty First Century Communications (TFCC). It is a high-speed telephone emergency notification system, which has the largest call handling capability in North America. Originally developed to help electric utility customers report power outages, the system has been refined to reach thousands of

people instantly and serves government agencies, public safety entities, businesses and other participating organizations.

The company is operating the national “1-877-Loved-1s” program, which has helped to reunite more than 10,000 family members and friends since September 2. During the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, TFCC handled three million calls in September and has taken nearly 1.3 million calls in October.

Systems like UCS are gaining wider use by local governments to alert residents in the event of an emergency, threat, or crisis as well as to check on health and safety. Calls can be tailored to a specific street or set of blocks, as in the case of a hazardous waste spill, or to check on a particular population, like the well being of senior citizens during extremely hot or cold weather.

In addition to sending outbound emergency notification, the system also handles simultaneous inbound calls from hotlines, incoming information lines concerning an incident, and lines used to report damage.

This system should prove to be a valuable tool in the emergency notification process for all Franklin County residents and businesses.