

## **Agenda Item Number 15.B.**

### **Community Emergency Notification System (CENS)**

**Presenter:** Galen Howard

**Action Recommended:** Information only

**Issue Summary:**

- Telephone based emergency notification system implemented in 1999 was discontinued in December 2002 due to lack of funding
- Partner agencies have affirmed their commitments and system is expected to be operational by November 1, 2003

**Background:**

The Lane area Community Emergency Notification System (CENS) is a telephone based alerting system that augments traditional public notification methods by directing emergency alerts to threatened areas. CENS was developed through a partnership of private businesses and public agencies. After successful testing, CENS became operational on December 5, 1999 (the first of its kind in the country). The partnership agreement identified funding commitments for three years ending December 1, 2002. Due to the economic downturn, several private partners decided not to continue funding and local government were unable to make-up the difference. Due to lack of resources, the vendor contract was terminated in December 2002.

A three year funding commitment from Cities, Lane County and Borden Chemical will again allow resumption of the service with testing in October and implementation November 1, 2003. Total first year costs are estimated at \$75,000 and \$65,000 recurring.

## **How CENS Works:**

CENS utilizes address/location/GIS data and a telephone data base to alert targeted areas to an urgent community event. The system can make more than 2,000 simultaneous calls and deliver a pre-recorded message providing detailed instructions to those in harms way. CENS has been used to alert areas threatened by a hazardous materials spill (this event included notification to two schools in the South Lane area) , urban fire storm and at-large dangerous subject. 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).

Across Oregon and across the Country agencies responsible for public safety are developing plans which address how citizens are to be alerted to an imminent manmade or natural threat. Systems are being acquired that can quickly call lists of public safety personnel, apprise them of the situation and provide response instructions.

In the event of an emergency/disaster, an authorized public safety official will designate the area to be alerted and initiate an appropriate message. Areas can be pre-designated such as flood plains, hazardous material storage sites and tsunami inundation areas, or identified on-the-fly such as in the case of a terrorist attack or urban fire-storm. A computer will call telephone numbers in the area and deliver a pre-recorded or real-time incident-specific message. Message repeat functions, call back when no answer, alternative language, delivery of text message to the hearing impaired and other specialized features are available. Depending on length of message, the system can deliver thousands of messages per minute.

## **CENS Funding:**

The \$65,000 total annual cost is accomplished by the funding of \$55,000 shared by participating local governments and Borden Chemical. The remaining \$10,000 will be funded by CENS activation user fees and through contributions from other agencies who have agreed to help with funding (i.e. Western Lane Ambulance, Siuslaw Rural Fire Protection District). Also helping to make up the shortfall, the cities of Eugene, Florence and Cottage Grove have expressed a willingness to fund more than their percentage share. Participating agencies are providing a non-binding three year commitment to the funding of CENS while a long term funding source is secured.