

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

In the Matter of Adopting a Policy for the
Columbia County Department of Emergency
Management's Use of Emergency Alert and
Warning Systems

ORDER NO. 73-2021

WHEREAS, as part of its role in providing for emergency preparedness, response and recovery the Columbia County Department of Emergency Management (hereinafter also referred to as the "Department") must have the ability to communicate quickly with the public during emergencies that pose a threat to public health and safety; and

WHEREAS, such communications are accomplished through Emergency Alert and Warning Systems, which include, among others, social media outlets, the County's webpage and mass notification systems such as the Columbia Alert Network ("CAN"); and

WHEREAS, the Department must also coordinate with other agencies, such as fire, law enforcement and emergency communications agencies, whose responsibilities often overlap during emergency situations; and

WHEREAS, a policy is therefore necessary to define the circumstances under which the Department should utilize Emergency Alert and Warning Systems;

NOW, THEREFORE, THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS hereby adopts the Emergency Alert and Warning Policy for the Department of Emergency Management, which is attached hereto as Exhibit A and incorporated herein by this reference.

DATED this 19 day of January, 2022

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

By: [Signature]
Henry Heimuller, Chair

By: [Signature]
Casey Garrett, Commissioner

By: [Signature]
Margaret Magruder, Commissioner

Approved as to form

By: [Signature]
Office of County Counsel



DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

COLUMBIA COUNTY
230 STRAND STREET
ST. HELENS, OREGON 97051

Policy: Emergency Alert & Warning

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to define the conditions under which the Columbia County Department of Emergency Management (DEM) will, and will not, utilize Emergency Alert & Warning systems (EA&W). Some systems are owned and operated by the County, while others are within the Columbia 911 Communications District (911) including the Columbia Alert Network (CAN). It also establishes the parameters of DEM's coordinating relationship with 911 and local public safety agencies with respect to emergency alerts.

Scope / Covered Parties:

- All County departments except the Sheriff's Department
- County Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Coordinating relationships with local public safety agencies
- Coordinating relationship with 911
- Shall be updated no later than 3 years after taking affect

Definition: Emergency Alert & Warning is a communication intended to inform the public of a hazard or threat so they can take appropriate action to protect their life, health, and property. EA&W is accomplished through a variety of systems as defined below.

Policy:

1. DEM shall lead the County's EA&W program.
 - a. The goal of the program is to provide accurate timely information to the citizens of the County so they can take actions to protect their life, health and property.
 - b. DEM shall coordinate all EA&W efforts with the PIO.
 - c. DEM shall delineate between two basic types of EA&W systems and their uses:
 - i. Opt-In Systems: Citizens *have* volunteered their personal information for contact during hazardous events (e.g. phone number, address, email for CAN) or subscribed to media where such information is posted (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, County Website). Opt-In Systems have a lower threshold for use because citizens in this group have requested they be contacted during hazardous events.
 - ii. Comprehensive Systems: Citizens *have not* volunteered their personal information for contact during hazardous events. 911 can still reach this constituency by Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to cell phones in a geographic area and data curated by emergency alert software contractors. Comprehensive Systems may only be utilized to drive citizens to take immediate action to save life, health or property.
 - d. If a County department believes that EA&W action is required, they shall coordinate through DEM.
 - e. The Director of DEM shall be the approving authority for sending EA&W messages.

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- f. If an error is discovered after an alert is issued, it shall be corrected thoughtfully and publicly.
- 2. DEM shall not provide EA&W services for public safety emergencies led by local public safety agencies (e.g. police & fire) for time sensitive alerts (e.g. active shooters, wildfire evacuations, etc.). DEM does not have the staff, facilities, nor direct access to EA&W tools to provide the level of service required for this critical mission. DEM shall make local police and fire agencies aware of this policy within 90 days of its effective date.
 - a. Upon request, DEM shall provide EA&W expertise to County organizations in order to facilitate rapid and accurate EA&W outreach from local public safety agencies through 911.
 - b. The County Sheriff's Department (Sheriff), as a separate response agency within the County, is outside the purview of this policy.
- 3. DEM may provide EA&W notifications for National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts of hazardous weather. This is designed to support, not supplant, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric weather radios.
 - a. If the NWS posts an Advisory level alert DEM may:
 - i. Post on appropriate County social media;
 - ii. Post on the County website.
 - b. If the NWS posts a Watch level alert DEM shall whenever possible:
 - i. Post on appropriate County social media;
 - ii. Post on the County website;
 - iii. Coordinate with 911 to send a message to CAN.
 - c. If the NWS posts a Warning level alert DEM shall whenever possible:
 - i. Post on appropriate County social media;
 - ii. Post on the County website;
 - iii. Coordinate with 911 to send a message to CAN.
 - iv. Coordinate with the PIO for appropriate media releases;
- 4. DEM may provide EA&W notifications for NWS forecasts of Red Flag conditions.
 - a. If the NWS publishes a Red Flag warning DEM shall whenever possible:
 - i. Post on appropriate County social media;
 - ii. Post on the County website;
 - iii. Coordinate with the PIO for appropriate media releases;
 - iv. Coordinate with 911 to send a message to CAN.
- 5. DEM may provide EA&W notifications for Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) air quality alerts.
 - a. If the DEQ posts an Unhealthy or Very Unhealthy level alert DEM may:
 - i. Post on appropriate County social media;
 - ii. Post on the County website.
 - b. If the DEQ posts a Hazardous level alert DEM shall whenever possible:
 - i. Post on appropriate County social media;
 - ii. Post on the County website;
 - iii. Coordinate with the PIO for appropriate media releases;
 - iv. Coordinate with 911 to send a message to CAN.

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6. Whenever able, DEM may provide appropriate EA&W notifications for volcanic activity utilizing information provided by the United States Geological Survey and the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries.
7. This policy acknowledges that various factors can prevent a message from being delivered and understood including technical limitations, legal restrictions, language, previous experience, level of community interaction, observations, perception of risk & proximity, length of residency, family composition, and access and functional needs.
8. The Director of DEM may create and curate a Standard Operating Guideline to coordinate the implementation of this policy across the covered parties.