



# Alert & Warning Systems and Nixle



## Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

April 13, 2020

# Presenters

- Christopher Godley, Director of Emergency Management
- Sam Wallis, Community Alert & Warning Program Manager
- Assistant Sheriff James Naugle
- Sheriff Mark Essick



# Discussion and Action Items

1. Staff Report - Alert & Warning Program
2. Alert & Warning Annex
3. Nixle and New Contract
4. Supplemental Budget Adjustments



Note: Board item on Evacuation in July 2021



# Warning Systems Refresher

- *Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA)*
- *SoCoAlert*
- *Emergency Alert System (EAS)*
- *NOAA Weather Radio (NWR)*
- *Neighbor to neighbor*



# 2017: Where We Were

- Did not use WEA
  - Insufficient use of Spanish
  - Insufficient trained Originators
  - No standardized messaging/templates
  - Controversy
- 
- Analysis and Recommendations
  - New Department of Emergency Management
  - New Alert & Warning Program



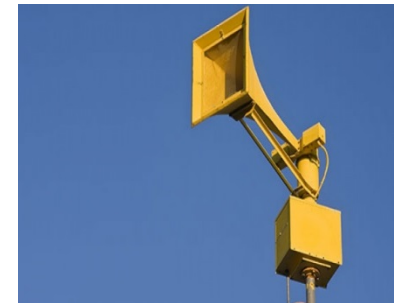
# 2021: Where We Are Now

- More trained Originators
- 24/7 Staff Duty Officer program
- Procedures, Tools, Training
- Standard message templates (English and Spanish)
- Expanded contacts: 105,000 to 367,000
- Posting information onto SoCoEmergency.org
- Testing and Exercise Events
- Alert & Warning Advisory Committee
- New technologies including NOAA Weather Radio
- Explored potential for outdoor sirens



# Outdoor Audible Warning Sirens

- Assessed best practices, siren technologies, systems limitations, deployment strategies, initial/ongoing program costs and also participated in field tests
- Sought federal grant funding but were denied
- Continuing to assess the potential for use in very specific hazard areas (ex. tsunami inundation zones)
- Cost to benefit
- Note: The effectiveness of outdoor sirens may be compromised by terrain, vegetation, urban development, and ability to be heard inside buildings



# 2021: Where We Are Now

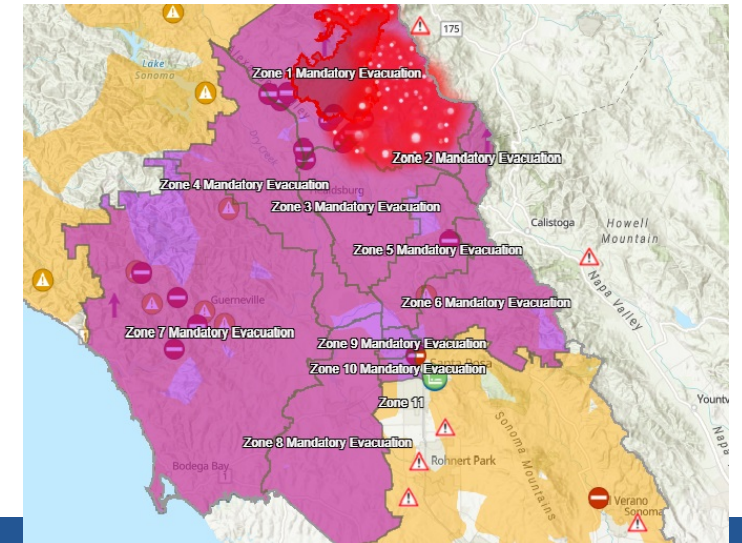
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- Use in real-world emergencies





# Use in Real-World Emergencies

- 2019 and 2020
- Systems used more than 140 times to successfully address life safety threats in wildfire, flood, pandemic, and public safety power shutoff incidents
- For example, the County activated the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system 59 times in 2020
  - Most extensive use by any single local or state government in the Country



# 2021+: Where We Are Going



- Streamline the experience of residents to reduce confusion
- Expand community engagement and conversations
- Promote equity for underserved communities
- Continue to expand the number of agencies that can originate alerts
- Improve ability to rapidly share data on developing emergencies
- Install more fire cameras and evaluate use of artificial intelligence
- Distribute auxiliary warning devices
- Expand the range of the NOAA Weather Radio system
- Research new potential warning technologies



# 2021+: Where We Are Going



- Advocate for resilience standards for commercial wireless broadband data systems (ex. power backups)
- Explore the long-term potential for a unified and sustainable Operational Area Alert and Warning program
- Address the needs of residents in hard-to-reach areas through adoption of new technologies, supporting efforts to expand broadband access, and empowering local community networking



# Alert & Warning Annex



Key elements include:

- Priority of use:
  - WEA, SoCoAlert, NOAA Radio, EAS, Hi-Lo sirens - Nixle and social media
- Policies and procedures
- Descriptions about the limitations for each warning system
- Tactics and best practices for how to employ each system
- Stakeholder agency roles and responsibilities
- Training and testing standards
- The issuing of warning messages simultaneously in English and Spanish
- Based on lessons learned and best practices with stakeholder input



# Nixle - Background



- Started in 2007 as a public info system for law enforcement agencies
- 15 law, fire, and local government agencies in Sonoma County
- Can be used to reinforce emergency warnings - the County's model
- Sheriff's Office has 350,000+ Nixle subscribers
- 16 million text messages each year
- 10 million emails each year
- Challenge: residents may feel they are not notified of incidents that are of interest to them or may feel they are notified too often



# Nixle - Contract



- Sheriff's Office contract with Everbridge for Nixle since 2017
- 2017 to 2020: \$29,500 per year for unlimited SMS (text) messaging
- Wireless broadband carriers recently started charging dramatically for mass texting
- Request for Proposals (RFP)
- New cost model:
  - \$29,500 will provide capacity for up to 1.6 million SMS messages.
  - Additional messages can be purchased at 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one cent per message
  - Based on use in prior years, not-to-exceed cost is \$175,000
  - If no disasters, actual costs should be much lower
- Additional \$145,500 in FY 21-22 budget requiring discretionary funding
- Seeking a five-year agreement, with the option to extend for two additional one-year periods in order to minimize impact on residents



# Department of Emergency Management Budget

- Other DEM functions (emergency coordination, community preparedness, and contracts) are integral to Alert & Warning program
- To maintain current alert and warning capabilities, need to sustain funding in Alert & Warning but also across all program areas
- DEM seeks \$90,000 for services and supplies and \$100,000 for contracts/post-incident assessments for the FY21-22 budget
- Operational tempo bears out these costs
- The department will continue its successful efforts to procure grants



# Questions/Discussion





