



City of Malibu News

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City of Malibu Conducts Successful Test of Disaster Notification System

(Malibu CA) – The City conducted a successful test of Everbridge, Malibu’s Disaster Notification System, on Wednesday, June 26 as part of the City’s ongoing efforts to improve disaster preparedness and to test an improvement of the system that dramatically increases the City’s ability to reach residents via cell phones.

“The City is doing everything possible to enhance community-wide preparedness for future disasters, and emergency communications are a critical component of that,” Mayor Jefferson “Zuma Jay” Wagner said. “This test helped us refine the system and raise awareness among the community of this important tool so that Malibu residents will be informed and empowered to make decisions and take action during disasters.”

The drill was conducted to test a significant expansion of cell phone contacts that the City recently acquired. Everbridge recently reached an agreement with cellphone companies to be able to provide government agencies, including Malibu, the cell phone numbers of account holders with addresses in their jurisdictions. That is crucial because, according to some estimates, fewer than half of all American homes currently have a working landline as more and more people “cut the cord.”

Until now, the only way the City had access to people’s cell phone numbers was if they registered themselves on the Everbridge system and added their cell number. Previously, only landline numbers were provided to the City by the phone companies. Now, the City will be able to increase the number of cellphones in the Everbridge database from about 3,600 to about 12,000. All information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with third parties.

Overall, the testing was successful. The testing was conducted in three phases in order to avoid overburdening the system while also facilitating post-test analysis of the new cell phone data. The results were reported to the Public Safety Commission on July 10. Of the 9,013 new cell phone contacts tested, 0% of the messages “unreachable” (meaning the system failed to send out those messages), and 2,250 (25%) were confirmed as received by the recipients, a much higher rate than in prior tests of the system.

The second phase of the test went to 16,333 mixed cell phone and landline contacts that the City already had with only 609 (3.7%) “unreachable.” Out of this group, 19.1% of recipients confirmed they received the message.

The third phase of the test went to 16,170 landline contacts that the City already had, with 0% “unreachable.”

The low confirmation rate for the third phase is likely due to the age of the contact data being tested and the fact that these were landlines, many of which are likely not connected to telephones.

Some residents reported receiving multiple calls and messages, even after confirming receipt of the test message. This is because some individuals’ contact information exists in multiple contact information databases and has consequently been

imported into Everbridge more than once. Everbridge does not currently automatically remove duplicate contacts. Staff will be manually removing duplicate entries, while also working to identify a streamlined solution to this issue moving forward.

Testing the Disaster Notification System has once again raised community awareness of the system, and many residents contacted staff to say that they did not receive a message or for some other assistance or questions. Staff plans to conduct another citywide test in September 2019 as part of the City's National Preparedness Month activities, but it will be organized geographically, rather than by contact data source type.

Background

Everbridge, the City's Disaster Notification System is only used in case of major disasters or evacuations to send urgent, critical information by landline phone call, cell phone call, text message and email. It is a separate system from the City's website Alert Center, which is regularly used to send out traffic, weather, utility and (minor) emergency alerts by text message and email to subscribers.

While there are still major challenges that were revealed by the Woolsey Fire, such as cell phone infrastructure being destroyed and widespread power outages, the expansion of cell phone numbers in the Disaster Notification System is a major improvement in the City's ability to get timely, relevant, actionable information out to the public during emergencies.

The City is exploring ways to overcome the issues of power outages and the vulnerability of cell phone infrastructure, which are problems that every government and public safety agency in the state are grappling with. The City is already installing repeaters for handheld radios that Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) team members and Sheriff's Volunteers on Patrol (VOPs), staff and other volunteers can use to distribute information out into the community.

The City is also considering loudspeaker siren towers, which can be solar or battery powered and can be programmed remotely to broadcast audio messages when other methods are down. A system of information distribution points is also being planned. Pop-up booths with bulletin boards displaying printed material would be placed at logical gathering places, such as shopping centers and gas stations, across the length of the City and near the City's emergency supplies storage containers. Printed public information would be brought out to the boards one or more times a day, and the City would conduct public outreach so that community members would know to go there to find public information when electronic communications have been knocked out.

To sign up for the City's disaster and evacuation alerts through Everbridge, visit www.MalibuCity.org/DisasterNotifications. For more information or assistance with signing up for Everbridge, call Public Safety Manager Susan Dueñas at 310-456-2489 ext. 313 or email SDuenas@MalibuCity.org.

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