

Computerized Warning System Alerts Pueblo Residents

Pueblo, CO – The county of Pueblo is located at the confluence of the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek, 112 miles south of the Colorado state capital in Denver.

Historically, flooding of most Pueblo County communities has been relatively infrequent. However, when flooding events occurred in August and September 2013, county and city officials were prepared to alert residents.

In the event of a flood, city and county officials consider it essential that they have the capability to warn residents. Warning residents in Pueblo County of potential flooding does not create a challenge because of the automatic emergency notification system they invested in, which has been installed by the county.

The emergency notification system is a Web-based program that can be launched from any computer with internet access. The program database includes Pueblo County resident names and phone numbers. When the alert system is activated, a series of phone calls are made to warn the residents of impending danger. Residents also have the option of calling the emergency operations center or going online to add their mobile cell phone number to the database as well.

“The system is activated by communication officers who watch the water closely and look for trigger points on when to do what,” said Karen Ashcraft, Emergency Management Coordinator for Pueblo County.

While the length of time required to transmit messages varies according to the number of phone lines activated, validating the success of the transmitted message is almost immediate. A computer-generated report displays how many people answered the phone to listen to the message, how many answering machines picked up, and the number of unheard messages.

Pueblo County uses the alert system for more than just flood events. The system can be used to alert residents when a variety of emergency situations arise, including shelter-in-place, tornado threats, chemical spills, abductions, and hostage situations.

The system is funded through the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP). The program is a partnership between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of the Army that provides emergency preparedness assistance and resources to communities surrounding the Army’s chemical weapons stockpile.

“Pueblo receives Federal funds each year to support community emergency preparedness projects,” said Mark Mears, Bureau Chief. “We are fortunate that we can benefit in so many ways from this program.”

Although the majority of their residences are contacted by the alert system, a situation does exist concerning the homeless being notified. “We have a lot of homeless folks near the drainage basin and we have no way to communicate with them but by personal contact,” said Earl Wilkinson, Director of Public Works for the city of Pueblo.



“When the water gets to a certain level, or if we anticipate it, we send police officers to tell these individuals to get out,” said Wilkerson. “This has happened twice in the last two years. Approximately 100 to 200 homeless individuals were told to leave the area during flooding events.”

“Other than this unique situation, the automated notification system is a successful mitigation tool and we are grateful that we can use the system to alert the majority of our citizens when there is an emergency,” Ashcraft said.

For additional information, please visit: <http://www.pueblountyoptin.com/> and <http://www.sheriff.co.pueblo.co.us/esb/>.