

**CALLING ALL RESIDENTS
THE ALERTMONTEREYCOUNTY SYSTEM**



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SUMMARY

In the event of an emergency, the County of Monterey is currently only able to reach less than 40% of all residents via landlines and wireless telephones. This is despite the fact that the county has a system capable of reaching every single resident with a wireless telephone, provided these residents have registered their phones with the county's emergency alerting system, known as AlertMontereyCounty.

Due to the importance of being able to notify as many residents as possible in the event of an emergency, the Monterey County Civil Grand Jury (MCCGJ) conducted an investigation to determine how effectively Monterey County residents without landlines are being notified of the need to register wireless telephones. We found that despite an initial publicity push in 2009 and a second attempt to promote registration in 2014, the county has not allocated sufficient resources or effort to effectively register residents.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this investigation, the MCCGJ interviewed personnel from the County's Department of Emergency Communications, Office of Emergency Services (OES), and the County Administrative Office (CAO). Members also toured the County's Emergency Services Center, witnessed a demonstration of the AlertMontereyCounty system, and reviewed published statistics and documents, including:

- Press clippings, internal communications, and external newsletters;
- The AlertMontereyCounty website, <http://www.alertmontereycounty.org>;
- Promotional materials prepared by the Office of Emergency Services;
- Metrics pertaining to the number of residents the system is currently able to contact;
- Data regarding use of wireless vs. landline telephones;
- 2010 Census Data.

DISCUSSION

Emergencies that require notification of residents may be countywide or limited to a specific geographic area. The types of emergencies requiring notification include such events as a lost child or adult, a tsunami warning, flooding, hazardous materials (HAZMAT) incidents, wildfires, power outages, train crashes, major traffic accidents, or law enforcement incidents requiring residents to stay in place. In any of these cases, it is vital that affected residents are contacted quickly with accurate and consistent information.

NOTIFICATION METHODS IN MONTEREY COUNTY

The system for alerting residents in most communities is commonly referred to as a “reverse 911 system” whereby emergency managers can dial out to the telephones of residents. This type of system is based entirely on landlines and other data received from the local telephone company (published and unpublished numbers). The County of Monterey has the capability to make reverse 911 calls to landlines in most of the county, with the exception of people living in the City of Carmel, which maintains its own 911 dispatch system. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) also maintain a separate reverse 911 system for notification of residents in the Carmel Highlands and Pebble Beach.

As the use of cellular and other wireless devices increases, the effectiveness of reverse 911 systems is more and more limited. According to the Pew Research Center, in an article published in July, 2014, it is estimated that more than 42% of all households nationwide are wireless only. Wireless includes both cell phones and Voice Over Internet Protocol or VOIP phones, such as those offered by Vonage, Comcast, AT&T, etc. In Monterey County, the Emergency Communications Department estimates the number of wireless-only households is closer to 70%. Even those residents with a landline may be more accessible via a cellular telephone.

Wireless-only residents can be contacted through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Wireless Emergency Alerting (WEA), which accesses cell towers to send messages. This system presents a number of limitations, however: it relies entirely on text messages, can only send to smart phones, sends messages in English only, and must broadcast to the entire county with no specific geolocating capability.

Many institutions of higher education within the county—specifically Monterey Peninsula College, California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB), Hartnell College, and the Naval Postgraduate School—currently have their own systems for sending notifications to students, faculty, and staff. CSUMB is planning to switch over to the AlertMontereyCounty system for this purpose.

ALERTMONTEREYCOUNTY

First introduced in 2009, the AlertMontereyCounty system utilizes software that can relay information in both emergency and non-emergency situations via text or voice recording. This information can be sent to a wireless telephone, a landline, or a computer, with preference specified by the registered resident. Messages can be sent in either English or Spanish, again based on the preference specified by the resident. Recipients of messages can be targeted by neighborhood, city, or any specified geographic area based on physical address.

In 2013, the county changed to a newer, more flexible software system. The company now under contract with the county is Everbridge, a national company that owns and runs the software platform, at a cost of \$76,000 per year. This fee is paid by the county’s Emergency Communications Department and incorporated cities within Monterey County. In addition to geolocating, the Everbridge platform can specify a number of variables in delivering messages, including:

- How an individual is contacted (home phone, mobile, or email);

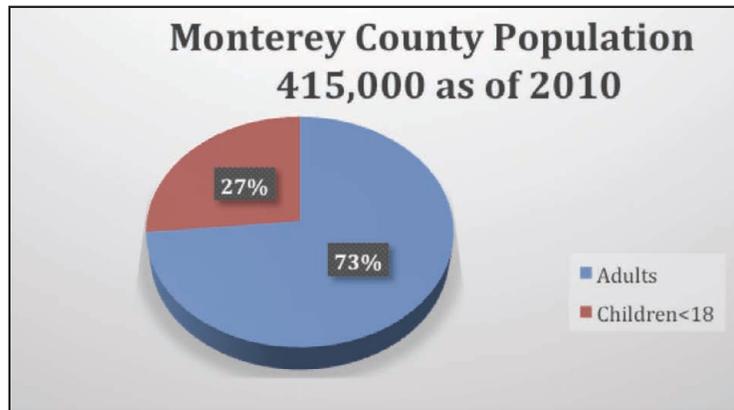
- Duration of the message broadcast/how often to repeat the message (1 hour, 2 hours, etc.);
- Number of times the message cycles;
- Interval between delivery methods;
- Voice mail preference (i.e., whether or not to leave a message);
- Sender’s request for confirmation of message receipt.

All published landlines, business and residential, are automatically downloaded into the system. Unpublished landlines can be acquired from the Emergency Communications 911 dispatch center in the event of an emergency. However, wireless telephones must be individually registered via the AlertMontereyCounty website (<http://www.alertmontereycounty.org>). Monterey County runs the front-end of this website (the introductory section), which is available in both English and Spanish. Everbridge runs the back-end where the actual registration takes place. Everbridge does not confirm registration and the registration process is currently available in English only.

Cities and the county can also use the system to communicate with employees. In the case of the county’s 4,500 employees—all designated as disaster relief workers by means of their employment—this internal communication ability is particularly important. Not all of these employees have registered their wireless telephones with AlertMontereyCounty, although the Monterey County OES is currently promoting the system internally to county employees and department heads. The OES is also working with city governments within the county, training their designated representatives on the use of the system and how to access AlertMontereyCounty to reach both employees and residents.

PARTICIPATION IN ALERTMONTEREYCOUNTY

The need for residents to register wireless telephones with AlertMontereyCounty has been publicized in various ways over the past six years. The OES contacts the general public on an ongoing basis at such gathering places as preparedness fairs, senior

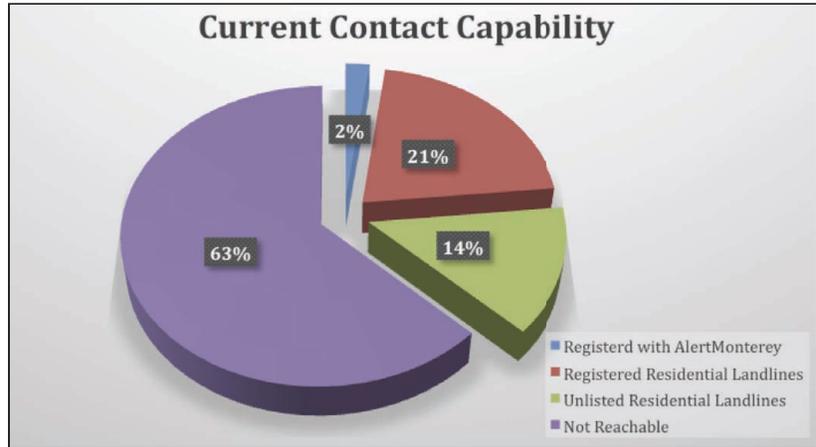


centers, and through periodic press releases issued by the communications arm of the CAO. Social media—including a blog and twitter feeds—are also used by OES. Individual city governments have sent periodic notices to residents and some are promoting the system in other ways such as street banners. Community groups have also issued notices to members.

In 2009, a promotion of the initial system launch was sponsored by AT&T and publicized through printed materials and local media. Materials were distributed to the public through public events and the Monterey County Free Library system, where individuals were offered assistance in completing the online registration process. As of February 2015, although some promotions continue, local libraries are not consistently offering information and registration assistance despite the fact that residents who do not have computers are encouraged in AlertMontereyCounty promotional materials to go to the library to register.

A second phase of the 2009 promotion, led by cities and OES, was planned but did not occur because no funds were available. In September 2014 OES announced a planned test of the system, publicized through four press releases, which generated coverage in local media. This publicity effort appears to have been successful; of the 1,800 individuals who registered in 2014, 60% registered in September.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Monterey County has a total of 415,057 residents, 305,600 over the age of 18 years. The AlertMonterey-County database includes 40,410 residential landlines. In the event of an emergency, the system can access an additional 27,149 unlisted residential landlines from the 911 databases.



Assuming 60% of landline households contain two adults and 40% contain a single adult,¹ this means emergency contact via landlines may reach as many as 108,000 adults—if they are at home when an emergency occurs. As of March 15, 2015 a total of 6,508 individuals had registered wireless telephones with AlertMontereyCounty. This means that, in an emergency, the county may be able to contact 114,508 individuals at their residences or on their wireless telephones—less than 38% of the adult population. With the addition of business landlines that number could increase slightly, given that some individuals may have wireless telephones for personal use and landlines at their place of work.²

There are a number of possible reasons why more people are not registering their wireless telephones with AlertMontereyCounty:

- They agree to sign up once they hear about it but don't get around to actually doing so;
- Many individuals take preparedness action—such as registering their wireless telephones—only in the wake of a disaster;
- The registration process on the website is somewhat confusing to those who are not experienced computer users (i.e., requires a password to proceed);
- Having the registration form in English-only presents a language barrier for non-English speakers; and
- Registration requires both an e-mail address and a computer; those people who turn to the libraries for assistance in registering might not have an e-mail address.

The goal of the county is to have *all* wireless telephones registered, including Carmel, Pebble Beach, and Carmel Highlands.

¹ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 27% of U.S. households are comprised of single adults living alone and 13% of households are headed by a single parent.

² There are 13,682 business landlines in the AlertMontereyCounty database. This means individuals who have not registered their wireless telephones may receive alerts through their place of business, provided that business has a landline.

FINDINGS

- F1.** AlertMontereyCounty is potentially the most effective method of reaching all citizens with both emergency and non-emergency notifications, in English and Spanish.
- F2.** Despite maintaining a sophisticated and flexible alerting system, the County of Monterey cannot reach the majority of residents in an emergency using AlertMontereyCounty.
- F3.** Reaching all citizens in the event of an emergency is critical.
- F4.** Individuals can register for AlertMontereyCounty only through the website, making registration difficult for those who are not experienced with computers or do not own a computer.
- F5.** It is difficult for residents who do not speak or read English to register.
- F6.** As disaster relief workers it is important that all county employees can be contacted in the event of an emergency.
- F7.** Adequate funding has not been allocated for advertising and promoting the need for individuals to register wireless telephones with AlertMontereyCounty.
- F8.** Having all residents of the county registered with AlertMontereyCounty will allow for consistency of messaging in the event of an emergency.
- F9.** Because the Everbridge software does not include a follow-up component, residents who attempt to register get no confirmation that registration has been successful. If the registration has not been accepted for some reason, they may not know and have a false sense of security with the notification process.
- F10.** Libraries are an important access point for many residents. As of February 2015, printed materials regarding AlertMontereyCounty were not available at many local libraries, and library staff, when questioned, were not fully briefed on the registration process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** OES continues training city personnel in the application and use of AlertMontereyCounty.
- R2.** OES reaches all agencies operating within the county—including Highway Patrol, Sheriff, and CalFire—for training in the use of AlertMontereyCounty.
- R3.** CAO immediately commits resources (financial and personnel) needed to publicize AlertMontereyCounty with the goal of registering all wireless telephones by a specified target date.
- R4.** OES works with local libraries throughout the county to distribute information about AlertMontereyCounty and to assist patrons in registering wireless telephones. All libraries should be participating by the end of 2015.
- R5.** County and municipal governments require all county and municipal employees to register their wireless telephones by the end of 2015.

- R6.** OES seeks the assistance of Everbridge in developing alternatives, by the end of 2015, for residents to register for AlertMontereyCounty. These alternatives may include but not be limited to:
- a) Telephone
 - b) Printed application that can be mailed to the OES.
- R7.** OES requests Everbridge to provide a Spanish language registration form by September 30, 2015.
- R8.** OES asks those institutions or agencies currently using their own notification systems (the City of Carmel, CalFire, Monterey Peninsula College, Hartnell College, and the Naval Postgraduate School) to encourage constituents to register with AlertMontereyCounty by June 30, 2016.
- R9.** OES works with senior centers, assisted living facilities, and medical facilities to educate and register staff, members, and residents.
- R10.** CAO convenes a working group of emergency services personnel and interested parties to promote registration with AlertMontereyCounty.
- R11.** As a supplemental funding mechanism, partnerships be formed whereby local businesses pay for the cost of printed materials promoting registration in exchange for printing their name and logo on the materials.

RESPONSES REQUIRED

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05, the MCCGJ requests Responses to all Findings and Recommendations as follows:

- Monterey County Board of Supervisors

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