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County of Santa Clara to Implement County Regional Emergency Notification System

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— In the event of a disaster, the County and local cities may need to communicate evacuation areas, shelter locations or other life-saving information to approximately 1.8 million residents and 565,000 households in Santa Clara County. Today, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors approved a contract with Blackboard Connect Inc. to begin the implementation of a regional emergency notification system.

"In a large-scale disaster, protecting the safety and well-being of our residents is paramount," said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chair of the Board of Supervisors and the County of Santa Clara Disaster Council. "The emergency notification system will enable the County and local cities to notify residents quickly and effectively with potentially life-saving information."

The emergency notification system can be used for a variety of emergency and community service notifications such as fires, crime incidents, hazmat incidents, infectious disease information, contaminated food warnings, road/school closures, and contacting disaster service workers.

"We're building our capacity to alert residents during disasters," said County Executive Pete Kutas, who serves as the Director of Emergency Services in a disaster. "During the coming months, we will be putting into place a comprehensive emergency communications system. The new system will be a great benefit for the community."

While no one knows exactly when or where a disaster will strike, it's more than likely to cross city boundaries and encompass several cities in a wide geographic area. The County of Santa Clara is spearheading the purchase and implementation of a county regional public and internal notification system that will be used by the County and 15 cities in Santa Clara County. The regional emergency notification system does not replace first responders' communications systems.

County of Santa Clara to Implement County Regional Emergency Notification System – page 2 of 2

“Disasters are unpredictable and may not be confined within city boundaries. It is imperative that we implement a unified countywide notification system,” said Supervisor Ken Yeager.

During large scale disasters affecting more than one city, the County becomes the coordinator of emergency response to provide resources, identify the need for mutual aid in support of local cities, and coordinate with state and federal authorities. The primary goal of the County’s emergency management and response in a disaster is to save lives. Activities may include evacuations, coordination of shelter locations, and public health advisories; reducing property loss and damage to the community; and working to get affected business, community, and government services back online and functioning.

For example, if residents need to be notified of an evacuation, the public notification system enables the county or local city to contact its residents in a targeted or countywide geographic area through multiple means of communication including home and work land lines, cell phones, email and text messaging. The system provides the ability to notify residents anytime or prescheduled in targeted or regional areas and can be activated by web, phone or satellite phone. Once a notification is sent, the system tracks results and reports on message delivery including which messages had a live delivery, answering machine, bad phone number, busy signal, hang up, fax/modem or undeliverable. The system has the means to resend the undelivered messages.

Initially, to reach residents during an emergency, the system will use databases for 911 and 411, and other databases where the public and businesses have voluntarily provided their contact information. For non-emergency community notifications, the system will use 411 and other databases.

The expected cost for the emergency notification system is \$1,460,000 per year for the first three years for countywide implementation.

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