

NEWS

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New TENS has potential to give residents control

County residents may soon be able to participate in a highly advanced emergency notification system thanks to action taken today by the Board of Supervisors.

The board today unanimously approved a contract with New Jersey-based SwiftReach Networks to provide the county with a new Telephone Emergency Notification System, or TENS, that would include features far beyond those offered by the county's current TENS provider.

SwiftReach offers residents the ability to add cell phone numbers, work phone numbers, and other phone numbers besides their home numbers to the list of numbers that would receive emergency notices. The company also allows residents to sign up for emergency notices via e-mail and text messaging in a variety of languages.

The current system has been an overwhelming success, placing more than 240,000 calls during 20 wildfire and flood-threat events since it was created in 2004. However, the current system can only send recorded alerts to land-line phone numbers provided to the county by the various phone service providers.

"This system has the potential to put residents in control of how they receive disaster information," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane.

Emergency officials from various public safety agencies will eventually discuss and recommend which of the new features offered by SwiftReach will be available to residents. In the meantime, the county's current ability to call selected land lines will remain in effect and uninterrupted. The Board of Supervisors authorized \$145,000 to fund the SwiftReach contract for two years, and \$155,000 over two years for the services of a computer mapping technician.