

CodeRED Emergency Notification System Will Enable Targeted Emergency Calls to Homes, Businesses, Cell Phones, as well as Email Alerts

On October 1, Rice and Steele Counties, along with the Cities of Northfield, Faribault and Owatonna, launched a “reverse 9-1-1” notification system for use during emergencies. The system gives city and county officials the ability to deliver urgent pre-recorded emergency telephone messages to targeted areas or to an entire city at a rate of up to 1,000 calls per minute. Called CodeRED, the high-speed telephone emergency notification service will be used in emergency situations such as, hazardous materials spills where an evacuation is necessary, or other situations that can affect people’s safety or health.

“We expect to use CodeRED sparingly,” noted Sheriff Richard Cook, who along with Emergency Management Director, Jennifer Hauer-Schmitz, is one of the government officials who can authorize an emergency alert. “But if and when we use it, the results promise to be significant. Just imagine the lives we could save if we could simultaneously warn everyone in a given area of impending flooding or alert everyone in a neighborhood when a child or someone with Alzheimer’s goes missing.”

Cook said the program could be beneficial in fighting crime when used to notify residents of emergent crime alerts. For instance, should a string of burglaries occur people in the affected area could be notified with a message detailing the situation. In the event of an escaped prisoner, nearby neighborhoods can be readily alerted. The system will also be utilized for volunteer and other response team callouts such as, the Dive Team, SWAT, and Skywarn volunteers.

Each of the entities involved will pay \$3,000 a year for the service. The switch in systems isn’t costing the county additional money, Cook said, because funds are already designated for this purpose. The system replaces CityWatch, a program Rice and Steele Counties used for five years at the cost of \$5,000 a year. The CityWatch program was rarely used, said Cook, because it was “technically cumbersome.” CodeRED, on the other hand, “[has] been tried and true in places throughout Minnesota.” Other areas using the program include St. Paul, Edina, Houston and Winona Counties.

Go Online to Add Cell Phones, Email Addresses

While CodeRED begins with an existing database of telephone numbers, “No one should automatically assume his or her phone number is included. Every citizen should go their local government website (Sites are listed below) and click on the CodeRED link. This link will take you to a form that you can complete to ensure you are included in the system.”

“You can also indicate the most effective way for you to be notified by going to the Community Notification Enrollment page.”

Requested information includes first and last name, street address (physical address—no PO boxes), city, state, zip code, primary phone numbers and additional phone numbers and email address (optional). Residents and businesses may also choose to receive text or email messages about emergencies, in addition to telephone calls.

The following individuals are encouraged to add their information to the database: Residents with unlisted phone numbers; Residents who have changed their phone number or address within the last year; Residents who use a cellular phone as their primary phone; Residents who have recently moved, but kept the same listed or unlisted phone number; Residents who wish to receive text and/or email messages in addition to telephone calls; Residents who receive their phone service over the internet; All businesses.

CodeRED is a geographically-based notification system, which means street addresses are needed to select which phone numbers will receive emergency notification calls in a specific emergency. An associated street address is needed for cell phone numbers.

CodeRED gives those who want to be included an easy and secure method for doing so, and the information will only be used for emergency notification purposes. Residents and businesses may also opt out of the system entirely if they so choose.

While the system works well for most phones, the use of special downloaded ring tones on cell phones, as well as automated telephone systems that require the caller to press a key will prevent an emergency call from reaching that phone.

The new system isn't an all-or-nothing alert. CodeRED is a geographically based notification system, which means that targeted populations — like a specific neighborhood — can be contacted.

But what if you are not home when a notification goes out? The system can deliver messages to voicemail and answering machines and can send text alerts to the TDY/TDD equipment used by the hard of hearing as well. Caller ID will provide a phone number (866-419-5000) that you can call to have the message repeated. For easy identification you can program this number (866-419-5000) into your cell phone.

Local Government Websites:

- Rice County: www.co.rice.mn.us
- City of Northfield: www.ci.northfield.mn.us
- City of Faribault: www.ci.faribault.mn.us
- City of Lonsdale: www.lonsdale.govoffice.com
- City of Morristown: www.ci.morristown.mn.us

Here is the link to your Community Notification Enrollment Page (CNE):

<https://login.coderedweb.com/coderedataentry/Default.aspx?groupid=NvzkMKitwYGcgKJs1pS%2fZw%3d%3d>

