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### **Solano County able to alert residents if disaster strikes**

By ANDREA WOLF/Times-Herald staff writer  
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When disaster strikes in Solano County, emergency officials can contact residents immediately with crucial emergency information.

Thanks to CityWatch, a telephone notification system, the Solano County Office of Emergency Services can provide information to thousands of people in just a few minutes, Solano County Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Paula Toynbee said.

Also known generically as reverse 9-1-1, the system was used extensively this past week to notify Southern California residents they needed to evacuate their homes during the devastating wildfires in seven counties.

Solano's Office of Emergency Services has 48 lines set up for CityWatch, and based on a 30-second message, can make 3,000 to 5,000 phone calls in an hour, said Kevin Ives, an Office of Emergency Services technician.

CityWatch is useful if a natural disaster hits, like massive floods, wild fires or an earthquake, but the system also is used for other functions, Toynbee said.

CityWatch has been used in Solano County to find a missing person and to locate suspects sought by police, Toynbee said.

"We have the ability to use CityWatch on a city, a street, or we can map on a computer to call a specific geographic area," Toynbee said.

Solano County installed the system about 10 years ago, and the last major disaster that required its use were the floods in the winter of 2005, Toynbee said.

The phone system has the ability to call all resident and business land lines, but Solano County's phone number database does include cell phone numbers, Ives said.

CityWatch does have the capability of contacting cell phone numbers, if the city requests that function. But Ives said there's a problem with accuracy when calling cell phones. If the person is 50 miles away from the incident, it is not productive to be contacting them.

Currently there is research being conducted on how to send emergency messages to cell phones near a specific cell phone tower, which cover about a mile or two, but that technology is not yet available, Ives said.

As technology progresses, emergency communication also improves, and emergency services is hoping to be able to send

out emergency e-mail notices in the near future.

Emergency services has teamed up with 95.3 KUIC radio station to provide emergency reports immediately throughout the county.

"We can call the radio station, give them emergency information and have it on the air within seconds," Toynbee said.

CityWatch is made by Avtex, a Minneapolis-based telecommunications equipment company, and is also used in other Bay Area cities, such as Oakland, Fremont, Alameda, Union City.

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