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# RECOMMENDATIONS ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

## Yolo Alert; Access & Functional Need (AFN) Registries

Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee of Yolo Commission on Aging & Adult Services  
May 23, 2023

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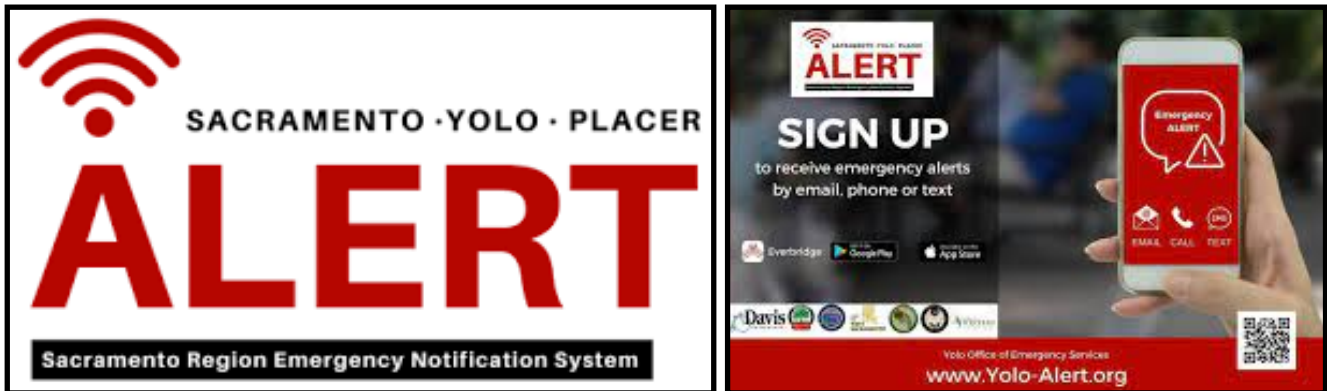


In consultation with Kristin Weivoda, Chief of Office of Emergency Services, the following recommendations are tentative only, identifying two major areas of concern regarding emergency preparedness. The recommendations will be reviewed and considered by the newly formed Disaster Services Council, once it is up and running.

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# Yolo Alert

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1. Alert messaging has not always been functional or well understood by members of the public.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

To ensure alerts are clear, concise and useful, Yolo County OES should collaborate with the new Public Information Office resource prior to an emergency, when constructing community information and sample alert messages that follow state OES guidelines.

### **FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

The county is responsible for alerting the unincorporated areas, while each city is responsible for alerts within their jurisdiction. Because the county and cities both use the Yolo Alert system, they need to agree on the precise definition of community information and preparedness alerts versus the definition of emergency alerts. An ad hoc task force of the newly formed Disaster Services Council can determine these definitions.

The county needs to be more expansive in using social media for its community information and preparation alerts, other than Facebook, e.g. YouTube (especially to gain access to livestream video of the actual emergency), Twitter, Nextdoor; city social media.

It should be noted the three counties sharing in the Sacramento Region Emergency Notification System that have a shared contract with Everbridge - Placer, Sacramento and Yolo Counties - are moving to have separate accounts. In consequence, they may tailor any changes to the Everbridge software platform to their specific county needs. Prior to this, if Yolo County wanted to make any changes to the notification system on Everbridge, it had to obtain permission of Placer and Sacramento Counties.

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2. Alerts have not always been received by members of the public either because: they did not live in the effected area of the emergency; or they did not sign up for YoloAlert; or did not sign up properly for YoloAlert in a way that would be the most useful to them, e.g. did not check the boxes on the sign-up page of the cities where they live or work.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

To make sure the public is receiving the most beneficial alerts, table-top exercises should be conducted, with a public feedback loop, to assess whether there has been effective alerting and messaging.

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

These table-top exercises should take place through coordination with the Disaster Service Council, after it has created draft policies and plans by gathering feedback from the community on gaps, needs and necessary changes. Members of the public at large should be encouraged to participate in these exercises, including those persons who are non-English speaking, are disabled, have special transportation needs, are of different ages, or are not tech-savvy. The county should collect information during these exercises, as to what the county does or doesn't have available to assist the public during an emergency.

3. During an emergency, many citizens want to know what is going on in different parts of Yolo County other than where they reside, e.g. those who board horses, those who have friends or family members that live in another part of the county.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

To ensure that anyone who wants to know what alerts were sent by any agency to any part of the county during an emergency, we recommend that Yolo County OES create a webpage that encapsulates every alert sent by all jurisdictions as has been done in Solano County.

To maximize clarity, part of the alert message should include the issuing entity, but the cities and county must agree to include this in their alerts. This detail can be discussed in the Disaster Services Council.

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

Since we drafted this recommendation, Kristin Weivoda of Yolo County OES has implemented our proposal for such a webpage: <https://www.yolocounty.org/government/general-government-departments/office-of-emergency-services/current-emergencies-and-incidents> See: "For recent alerts, please visit [Yolo-Alerts](#)." This links to the "[Notifications](#)" tab on the Sacramento Regional Emergency Notification System's website. People do not need to be logged into Yolo Alert or even have a Yolo Alert account to read the notification feed.

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**Before sending an alert out, a county or city originator of the alert has to check a box to post it to the Yolo County OES website - it is an opt-in feature. However, cities in Yolo County are not yet checking the box in Everbridge to post alerts to this new webpage, so need to be educated on it.**

4. The process of signing up for Yolo Alert is confusing, because the public is unsure of exactly what alerts they have signed up for.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**To alleviate confusion in understanding what alerts should be sent to the public according to the preferences they checked off on the sign up web page, make the process for signing up for Yolo Alert simpler and/or better explained.**

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

**There may be some limitations because of Everbridge, so any changes must take these restrictions into account.**

**When a person checks a box on the Yolo Alert page, it needs to be clear just what they signed up for; what they will or will not receive; and from which agencies they may receive messages.**

**It is not clear how cities or agencies are using the opt-in categories of messages available on the Yolo Alert registration page. The choices vary by jurisdiction. There is a need to define what the options are (e.g., define what “community messages” means) and build out Everbridge to accommodate those options. Subsequently there should be an outreach campaign to explain those options to the community.**

**The County and cities should discuss, and agree upon, set definitions and procedures that all agencies will use.**

5. There is widespread confusion in the community about which agency or jurisdiction sends alerts, and to what members of the community.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**There needs to be discussion involving the county and all the cities in a meeting about city and county uses of Yolo Alert, specifically how overlap of jurisdictions is handled.**

**To ensure, in an emergency, that cities and the County understand who should be alerting citizens with what information, there needs to be discussion between the County and cities involving the use of Yolo Alert. More specifically how the overlap of jurisdictions is handled, and how information applicable countywide will reach people.**

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**FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

One issue that needs to be explored is if there needs to be a mass alert to the entire county, including the cities, at the beginning of an emergency, that includes where to obtain additional information.

The Disaster Services Council should be the lead in forming an ad hoc task force on clarifying and improving the Yolo Alert system, including jurisdictional issues.

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## Access & Functional Needs (AFN) Registry



According to Cal OES guidelines, local governments are encouraged to leverage their existing service systems rather than developing registries for those with access and functional needs. This is because of the difficulties in establishing and maintaining such registries, including:

- resistance to such a registry due to privacy concerns;
- the need to constantly update the registry and the liability for failure to do so;
- awareness of and access to such registries;
- the false confidence these registries give to residents that they will be rescued by first responders;
- the fact that registries do not have uniform purposes - some are for evacuation, others to identify wanderers.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

To facilitate the evacuation of those with access and functional needs during an emergency, Yolo County OES and local response agencies should coordinate with each other to develop a system to utilize data from existing service systems, including government and community based organizations, of persons

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who may need evacuation assistance. In Yolo County this could include but is not limited to Yolo Healthy Aging Alliance, In Home Supportive Services, local fire departments, senior living facilities, caregiving companies, local Fire Safe Councils, etc.

There needs to be public education and emphasis on creating personal support networks for those who have access and functional needs but do not access gov't services, and therefore are not on any list. The Cal OES recommendation is that such people have a list of at least five different people they can reach out to for assistance during emergencies.

**FURTHER DISCUSSION:**

There is an interesting new proposal, suggested by Kristin Weivoda of Yolo County OES: During sign-ups for Everbridge, a person can be asked if s/he has an access and functional need (AFN) and check off a box for their specific problem, e.g. speaks Spanish, is deaf, is blind, will need transportation in an evacuation. Specially tailored alerts can then be sent just to those specific people. They can also be shown how to update their information. This will afford the possibility of sending targeted alerts in an emergency situation.

This system can also provide return message capability that those with access & functional needs can respond to, that they need assistance. The message could also provide a phone number they can call for more information. Both the county and cities will need to get on board with this idea, and agree to set definitions and procedures.

It will be helpful to encourage organizations/agencies who have lists of their constituents to sign up for Yolo Alert. This idea of specifying an access and functional need in Yolo Alert has the advantage of Yolo OES being able to send out alerts quickly if there is a need to evacuate immediately, without the time consuming task of accessing various lists of people.

Formal registries must be constantly updated so that first responders are aware of those truly in need of assistance. When formal registries are not updated regularly, first responders may waste time attempting to assist someone who is deceased, no longer at the specified address, or no longer disabled. This new proposal has the advantage that the need for updating information is not quite as critical. The worst that will happen if information is not updated is that an alert will go out to someone no longer in residence or is no longer in need. Only those with current access and functional needs checked off on Yolo Alerts can respond for assistance.

