

Stafford sets up emergency notification system

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BY NANCY HUNTER
GANNETT NEW JERSEY

STAFFORD — In order to better serve the community, Township Administrator Paul Shives announced that a reverse 911 system has been installed to communicate information to the public in emergency situations.

Global Connect, which designed the emergency notification system, has successfully done work in the past for the township Board of Education in setting up a system to notify parents.

"It is very easy to use," Shives said Tuesday. "It's just a way to keep residents informed of what we are doing."

The Web-based system can be used from any computer with Internet capabilities as well as being map-based where you can draw a line around a specific area on a map if you wish to notify only those property owners.

"We principally obtained it for things like forest fires and flooding," Shives said, "but the system can be used for other things too."

Shives gave examples such as notification about fire hydrants flushing, drainage projects and mosquito sprayings as well as informing the public of events such as Founders Day and Heritage Weekend.

The police also will have access to the system if they need to get information out to a specific area about a crime or possible crime.

Using a call back feature residents can listen to a particular message and then press a designated key to contact the township for things like a flood or forest fire. Residents will be able to press a key and let officials know that they need special assistance in evacuating.

Residents can use an "opt out" feature to have their phone number deleted from the list. However, Shives does not recommend doing so.

Cell phones are not included as of yet since cellular companies are not required to make those numbers available. E-mail is expected to be included in the future as well.

Shives said that the system works very fast. It can notify more than 5,500 homes in just under 15 minutes and the entire town in under an hour.

Another advantage is the ability to contact public works employees in emergencies.

"All you have to do is hit a button, and it calls all the employees with a prerecorded message: "Please report to work and please verify you got this message by pressing number 3," he said.

Right now cell phones are not included in the plan, but Shives said that residents interested in having their cell phones on the call list will have the opportunity.

"If you want your cell phone on the call list, you can fill out the form in the newsletter and send it back to us or drop it off in our mailbox here," Shives said.

With a flat annual fee of approximately \$7,500, the township can use the system throughout the year for any purpose they deem fit.

"The system should be operational next week, and we will be making a test call to all township residents letting them know that the system is now in place," the administrator said.

