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NEWS

FirstCall alert system replaces Reverse 911

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Aransas County, the City of Rockport and the Town of Fulton have announced a partnership with the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) to launch the FirstCall Emergency Notification system. The FirstCall, which has many features, replaces the current and more limited system called Reverse 911.

Officials also emphasize residents must register with the system in order to receive message from first call. There are two methods by which residents may register: online <https://alertregistration.com/AransasCoTx/>, or by telephone at (866) 484-3264. The aforementioned link can be also be found on the three entities websites: www.fultontexas.org, www.aransascounty.org, and www.cityofrockport.org.



Phil Salemi, the new owner of Rockport's Ace Hardware, signed up for FirstCall Thursday afternoon. One can sign up for the new emergency alert system, which replaced Reverse 911, by logging on to alertregistration.com/AransasCoTx/.
Photo by MIKE PROBST

At registration, residents can choose to enter up to a combined total of five different phone numbers or email addresses.

McLester said, "With a variety of ways to be contacted, property owners and residents can be confident of receiving critical information affecting their community and property, especially those property owners whose permanent residence is not in Aransas County."

Rockport Police Department Lt. Larry Sinclair said for people who don't live here but have property here, they can also register with the local FirstCall. They then can receive information about what is happening locally and have the opportunity to come secure their home/boat, etc.

In addition, older residents with relatives who don't live here can have their family members register for FirstCall.

He reiterated, "But if you don't register, you won't get the message."

Residents with caller ID on their phones should take note the name which will appear is FirstCall and will show a 361 area code. If a recipient of a call wants to hear the message again, they may call the phone number which appears on the caller ID and be able to do so.

Officials point out FirstCall is free and extremely reliable, however, users should be aware their individual cell phone and Internet providers may charge fees for phone calls, text message, or email messages sent by FirstCall.

In addition, interruptions to one's cell phone or Internet service is outside the control of Aransas County, the City of Rockport and the Town of Fulton.

They also emphasize registration in the FirstCall emergency notification system is not a guarantee that you will receive any or all emergency messages sent. Residents are urged to monitor local

news and weather reports for official information and warnings.

FirstCall also gives officials the ability to allow residents to select a translation of the message from English into another language such as Spanish or Vietnamese.

The new system can be used to notify residents about critical information such as severe weather, utility disruptions, road closures, mission person alerts, disasters, and hurricane updates and evacuation information.

FirstCall provides officials with the ability to immediately send important information to residents using several different methods. For example, using FirstCall, local emergency planners can call approximately 5,000 phone lines a minute, allowing the entire community to be contacted with specific, timely information in a matter of minutes.

Emergency Management coordinator Rick McLester said, "One of the greatest strengths of FirstCall is its ability to send message through a wide variety of methods." Those methods are traditional landline telephones, cellular phones, SMS text messaging, email, and TTY/TDD devices.

Another important feature of the system is officials can call the entire community or just part of one block using simple, map-based drawing tools.

The LEPC, which is part of Aransas, San Patricio and Refugio counties, is funding the \$25,000 cost of FirstCall.

Sinclair explained the three aforementioned counties are part of the Coastal Plains LEPC. They had been talking about a mass notification system specific to these areas. He pointed out as far as television media; these counties are in the Corpus Christi news area, which are more focused on Corpus Christi in terms of evacuation, with the inland counties getting a "trickle down" effect.

Sinclair said officials in the three counties worked together with the LEPC, which is a partnership of industry and local emergency planners, to come up with a program specifically for the three counties.

Sinclair also noted for any individual who is unable to self-evacuate in case of a hurricane or disaster, they may dial 2-1-1 and register. The list of individuals in a particular county will be given to local emergency management, the county judge, or the mayor so they can be assisted in the event of an emergency.

Sinclair again pointed out, one can not be helped if they are not registered. Just dial 2-1-1, no prefix, etc., like dialing 9-1-1, he said.

Anyone with questions or who need assistance with FirstCall may contact Sinclair at 361-790-1134.

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