WarnCentralTexas boosts emergency warning registrations

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WarnCentralTexas.org is a new web portal launched region wide in May to increase participation for a regional emergency communications tool that sends alerts via text, email or phone calls during a disaster.

The website allows residents in Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, Travis and Williamson counties to register their emails and cellphone numbers to an address or addresses in those counties. Local government emergency personnel, who are responding to incidents and disasters in their communities, can then send location-based, direct warnings via email, text message and phone calls to WarnCentralTexas.org registered participants. Visitors are also encouraged to register if they often stay in the region.

CAPCOG has supported an emergency warning service for the region's local governments for more than a decade. The emergency notification service was launched when most residents still had landline phones; its ability to reach residents continues to decline as more people move to cellphone only households. CAPCOG registers landlines into the system automatically using the 9-1-1 database, but cellphone numbers and email addresses have to be self-registered. About 45,000 cellphone users are currently self-registered. Using the same easy-to-remember branding region wide should provide greater recognition with more users as the outcome.

CAPCOG uses CodeRED as the software tool for emergency notifications. Residents who are signing up to participate in the program at WarnCentralTexas.org may find the following questions and answers helpful.

WarnCentralTexas FAQ

How do I know that my local community is using WarnCentralTexas.org?
CAPCOG purchased the use of the system for its member organizations in the 10-county region — Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, Travis and Williamson counties. Cities and county officials have access to the CodeRED system for sending notifications to areas in their jurisdictional boundaries.

Who will be making the emergency calls and sending the text and emails to my devices?
Emergency management coordinators and other public safety officials have the authority to push emergency warnings to residents through CodeRED's database. The tool allows those sending the alerts to choose geographic areas to receive warnings based on the type of emergency.

Who will the call come from?
Emergency calls will come from the following phone numbers regardless of which city or county officials may be sending them. Residents may find it useful to save the numbers in their phones' contacts.

- Emergency Alert 866-419-5000
- Community Alert 855-969-4363
- Weather Warning 800-566-9780

What if I don't know if I signed up at WarnCentralTexas.org already?
If you are a managed account holder, CodeRED will tell you if your phone number is already in its system while you are registering. You will then be prompted to login. If you are not a managed account holder, you can simply resubmit your information, and it will be updated in CodeRED's self-registration database. There is no harm in re-registering to ensure the CodeRED database has your correct information.

How will my personal information be used?
CodeRed's database of registered users is not shared or sold. CAPCOG can request information from the CodeRed database, but it doesn't request personal information such as phone numbers and addresses so the information remains private.

Can I get emergency warnings based on my location instead of my address?
CodeRED offers a free mobile app for Android and iPhone devices. The app allows device owners to receive alerts based on the geo-location of their phone as long as they are within any jurisdiction that uses CodeRED. Download the CodeRED Mobile Alert app at Google Play or the Apple Store.

What other information can I receive by signing up at WarnCentralTexas.org?
The primary use of the emergency communications tool is to contact residents during disasters, but self-registrants can choose to receive general notifications, such as street closures, from local jurisdictions that use CodeRED. When registering for the system, residents also can request severe weather warnings from the National Weather Service about tornados, thunderstorms, flash floods or winter storms. More than one phone number and email address can be registered to a residential or business address.