

New Notice System Boosts UC San Diego's Emergency-Response Ability

June 4, 2007

Paul K. Mueller

Following the tragic deaths on the Virginia Tech campus in April, university leaders at the University of California San Diego conducted a Town Hall on May 7 for students, faculty and staff to explain the university's emergency-preparedness plans and procedures.

One of the communication upgrades promised by UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox at that meeting, a voice-and-text-messaging system sent to individual cell phones that promises to speed and expand campuswide notification of emergencies, began operation on Friday, June 1.

In a message sent to the university community on Friday, Steve Benedict, director of the Environment, Health & Safety (EH&S) department at UCSD, said, "I am pleased to announce the campus now has in place an additional system to provide notification in the event of an emergency. The new notification system allows official emergency announcements to be sent to your phone via text and voice messages.

"On a periodic basis, this system will be tested and you will receive test messages on your phone. Participation in this program is voluntary, but I encourage everyone to sign up and participate in this important element of our campus emergency services program. You can find instructions on how to register to participate in the emergency notification program at <http://blink.ucsd.edu/go/emergencyphonereg>.

For additional information regarding emergency preparedness, please go to <http://emergency.ucsd.edu>."

Campus events and notices will boost awareness of the system and encourage participation, said Benedict.

UC San Diego also uses a "reverse-911" system, which leaves messages on office phones, said Phillip Van Saun, manager of emergency services for EH&S.

When needed, campus police cars can use their public announcement system to alert the campus, Van Saun said, and the police department has access to a helicopter equipped with a public-address system.

According to UCSD Police Chief Orville King, campus police devote much of their efforts to prevention. The department is now fully staffed with 35 officers, who patrol the campus in cars and on bikes. To watch over what is essentially a city, they get help from a community crime-prevention program, with students acting as community service officers, King said.

Both King and Van Saun emphasize that UC San Diego conducts regular exercises and drills to test and improve emergency-response procedures, and that university leaders continue to evaluate new methods of communication and notification to take full advantage of available technologies in protecting the welfare of the campus population.

Media Contact: Paul K. Mueller, 858-523-8564

Comment: Phillip Van Saun, 858-534-1064