

NEWS



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For Immediate Release:

Philadelphia's Integrated Public Warning System Receives 2010 Emergency Management Digital Distinction Award

Deputy Managing Director MaryAnn E. Tierney is pleased to announce that the Managing Director's Office of Emergency Management has received the 2010 Emergency Management Digital Distinction Award for Best Process Improvement for its Integrated Public Warning System. The Emergency Management Digital Distinction Awards, a partnership between the Center for Digital Government and Emergency Management Magazine, recognize successful contributions to the first responder community's use of information technology.

The Philadelphia's Office of Emergency Management's Integrated Public Warning System uses a multi-medium digital approach to communicate emergency public information. These include ReadyNotifyPA, an emergency text alert and email message system; social media networking sites; digital billboards; and digital LED scrolls and HDTV flat screens on 39 newsstands in Center City Philadelphia.

"The use of digital technology has allowed us to greatly enhance our traditional methods of notifying the public and keeping them informed during emergencies," said Deputy Managing Director for Emergency Management MaryAnn Tierney. "While we still use radio and TV for emergency notifications, using digital media allows us to leverage new and emerging technologies to reach as many people as possible in times of crisis."

Two of the most recent additions to ReadyNotifyPA include Crime Alerts from the Philadelphia Police Department and alerts from the Sunoco Refinery. When a crime is reported in their area, the Police Department can send a text and email message to subscribers, alerting them about the crime. The Sunoco Refinery Alerts are used when an incident at the refinery has a public impact, whether or not it is an emergency. The refinery alerts can be for events that cause odors, noises, or visuals that are not normally present in the community. For example, an alert may be sent before the start up of construction activity or when equipment is placed back into service after maintenance or repairs which may be noticed by the community, such as flaring at stacks. In addition to these new categories, the public can also sign up for weather and traffic alerts through ReadyNotifyPA.

“We are also proud to report that CBS Always On, Philadelphia's Digital Newsstand Network, conducted the City's first street level emergency alert test on Wednesday, April 28 in cooperation with the Office of Emergency Management,” said Deputy Managing Director Tierney. The emergency test was conducted in conjunction with a Homeland Security exercise called Liberty RadEx taking place in Philadelphia last week. An emergency test tone and message appeared on newsstands' LED screens and High Definition TV screens for 30 seconds at the top of each hour that day. In the event of a large-scale emergency, people in Center City would be able to get up-to- the minute details and information through the CBS Always On network. The system has already been used since its installation -- to alert people to move their cars from snow emergency routes during this past winter's record snow storm.

The network of 39 newsstands in Philadelphia was launched in November, 2009 by the Newsstand Association of Philadelphia, Center City Direct and the seven CBS stations, including two TV and five radio stations in the Philadelphia market. The newsstand network is wired to provide Amber Alerts, storm warnings, information about terrorist attacks, evacuation information, natural disasters and more, coordinated through the City's Office of Emergency Management. By 2014, all newsstands in Center City will be outfitted with the new technology.

OEM has also established a presence on Blogger, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. These sites are being used to provide weekly emergency preparedness tips and to broadcast advisories before, during and after emergencies to update the public on preparation activities and response operations.

Director Tierney also reports that the Philadelphia division of Clear Channel Outdoor and the Office of Emergency Management established an agreement in 2007 so that emergency messages can be displayed on eight digital billboards owned and operated by Clear Channel Outdoor Philadelphia. The majority of the digital billboards are located along a stretch of I-95 just south of the Philadelphia International Airport and north to Street Road, as well as several major roadways in the area. The digital billboard units are 14' high by 48' wide and are strategically located along routes that experience heavy daily rush-hour traffic and are major arteries to Philadelphia. Messages can be static or run in 8-second spots in a 24-hour rotation.

The Center for Digital Government and Emergency Management Magazine invited nominations for the inaugural Emergency Management Digital Distinction Awards, to recognize successful contributions to the first responder community's use of information technology. The Center for Digital Government is a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government.

All civilian government emergency management agencies; fire, public safety, police/law enforcement, criminal justice, emergency response, emergency medical services, disaster risk reduction or mitigation, homeland security, or other emergency management; all levels of government and all countries worldwide, were eligible to nominate projects for the award.

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