Luzerne County offering new emergency alert notification system

By Jennifer Learn-Andes jandes@timesleader.com

This screenshot shows the enrollment page for Luzerne County's new mass notification system, CodeRED.

Luzerne County has a new mass notification system for residents to receive emergency alerts by phone, text or email.

Delivered through a program called CodeRED, the county Emergency Management Agency would issue the all-county alerts for significant emergencies, said county EMA Director Lucy Morgan.

"It's not something we'd be putting out every day. It would be something pretty major," Morgan said.

Residents also have the option to be notified if severe weather is occurring in the area of their address, including a tornado, major thunderstorm, flash flood and winter storm, Morgan said.

The system is funded by a federal Homeland Security grant, Morgan said. The county previously provided alerts through Swift911 but switched to CodeRed July 1 because that system is used by

the nine other counties in the Northeast Pennsylvania Regional Counter-Terrorism Task Force, which now includes Luzerne.

"It made sense for us all to be on the same system," Morgan said, noting there also was a cost savings for the grant funding by changing vendors.

The other counties in this regional task force, according to Morgan: Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming.

While Morgan's office worked to transfer all past Swift911 notification sign-ups to CodeRED, which is produced by OnSolve, she asks residents to check the new program to make sure their information moved over and remains current.

How to join

There are two ways to sign up or check accounts:

• Text "LuzerneAlerts" to 99411 on a mobile phone, with no space between Luzerne and Alerts, to receive a community notification enrollment link.

• Access the CodeRed link on the EMA page of the county website, www.luzernecounty.org.

The county's 76 municipalities also have the option to use the CodeRED system under the county's account to provide local emergency alerts to their residents at no cost, Morgan said.

In addition to sending out public notifications, county EMA uses the system to issue internal alerts to staff, volunteers, municipalities and other groups.

School superintendents will be included so they can be briefed on potential threats and other situations that may impact them, Morgan said. This way superintendents and other relevant school personnel can be reached through their phones instead of radios that may not always be at their side, she said.

Mass notification saves time, she said. EMA officials can send alerts from their phones without the need to log into a computer, she said. The system already is loaded with key information that can be provided for various emergencies that Morgan hopes never happen at the nuclear power plant in Salem Township owned by Susquehanna Nuclear LLC, she said.

For those opting to receive phone messages, Morgan suggests residents plug the CodeRED number into their contacts so they don't mistake it for spam. The number is 866-419-5000 for emergency notifications and 855-969-4636 for community alerts.

If the number appears in missed calls, the last bulletin delivered to that phone can be heard by dialing back.