

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

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Summary of Tuesday, April 23, 2013 Meeting

e-Notify: How Plants Notify the City & Other Agencies Responsible for Communicating with the Community in a Significant Industrial Event

Pete Greco, Manager Emergency and Security Services at the LyondellBasell Houston Refinery, described the steps a plant takes after a significant abnormal event to notify the City of Pasadena and other responsible agencies that need to know, including those in any other cities that may be impacted. Using uniform procedures and report forms, the refinery and many other facilities in the Southeast Regional Local Emergency Planning Committee (SERLEPC) now use an Internet-based program called e-Notify to send the notification.

The City of Pasadena and many other cities and Harris County are equipped and trained to receive e-Notify messages. Robert Hemminger, City of Pasadena Emergency Management Coordinator, said e-Notify not only provides the city with details about the event but also allows dispatchers to rapidly activate the city's warning systems if there is a need to shelter in place.

The information the plant provides to the city comes from Community Emergency Communications protocols developed several years ago by plants in the East Harris County Manufacturers Association, city and county Offices of Emergency Management, Local Emergency Planning Committees, and others. E-Notify was designed with these communication protocols in mind. Plants that do not use the computerized system provide the same information via phone or fax.

Industry and responsible agencies jointly adopted a three-level system to describe how serious an incident or event is. Prior to doing so, different companies and different cities used different numbers and definitions of event levels.

- Level 1 (Courtesy Message): Incident inside plant boundaries and will not impact the community
- Level 2 (Watch): Incident has potential to cross a plant's boundaries and may impact the community.
- Level 3 (Warning): Incident extends beyond a plant's boundaries and has impacted or will impact the community.

To make the best use of e-Notify, a plant loads plant-specific information into it before there is any incident. This includes the plant address, contacts, its "360 list" of nearby facilities, roads that might have to be closed, chemicals the plant could release, and so on. Event-specific information and weather information is added when an incident occurs. A short initial event report lets a plant provide the basics as quickly as possible. In a serious incident, the plant would use follow-up to provide more detail as needed. The city itself may be making the notification in events such as transportation incidents.

After notifications are made to the city, the plant would also post a message on the Community Awareness and Emergency Response (CAER) Line, 281-476-2237, when an event is noticeable and may be of concern to the public. The community may call the CAER Line to obtain facts about incidents.

E-Notify messages in Pasadena are received in Central Dispatch. A large, brightly colored box pops up on the dispatcher's computer screen, and a loud beeping begins. The box is color-coded. A green box is for a test. A yellow box is for a Level 1. A red box is for a Level 2 or Level 3. The beep will continue until the dispatcher acknowledges it. Even if the dispatcher is across the room, the noise and the brightly colored box will capture attention. The e-Notify screen includes a map showing where the plant is. For a toxic release, e-Notify will automatically create a plume showing how the release will move in the wind. The map shows the location of fire stations, schools, the city's warning sirens, etc. It also shows where the city has placed Alertus beacons. These are in schools and other publicly-owned buildings. They flash lights and make a loud noise to notify those in charge, and a text message can be read on a little screen.

How the Pasadena Community Receives Phone, Text, or Email Messages in an Emergency

The presentation concluded with discussion of what Pasadenans should do to be sure they can get a message from the city to warn them when there is a need. If there were a need for your area to shelter in place, Pasadena would send a message to residents and businesses in several ways.

Using "Reverse 911," the city would ring down telephones with the warning to shelter in place. However, the Greater Houston 911 database contains only land lines. A new feature, however, allows you to submit your cell phone number and your Internet phone number if you use Comcast, Vonage, Magic Jack, etc. To sign up cell and Internet numbers, go to www.911.org. Harris County uses Reverse 911 as does the North Channel area and Houston.

To receive messages from Pasadena by email or text, you may sign up for a free service called Nixle on the city website <http://www.ci.pasadena.tx.us/>. Go to the bottom of the Home Page where it says "Sign Up."

Every city in the area has a system for communicating with the public in an emergency. Some use Reverse 911. Others use a different service for telephone ring downs and for email and text. Think about your life and the cities from which you might need emergency messages – not just where you live but also where you work, where your elderly parents live, etc. Go to each city's website to find out what is available and sign up.