

# Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

## Summary of May 27, 2014 Meeting

### EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS REFRESHER

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council has discussed emergency communications multiple times over its 23-year history. Seeking a refresher on a topic where improvements are often made, members invited Frank Bengochea, Pasadena Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator, to speak. He explained the e-Notify system by which plants notify responsible agencies in affected cities and the county about significant events that may affect the public. He described the city's community warning systems and also included information about the Pasadena ISD warning systems. Facilitator Diane Sheridan closed by reminding members of the changes made to the CAER Line in early 2014.

Bengochea explained that plants notify the City of Pasadena of a significant industrial event by using the e-Notify system or calling 9-1-1, following protocols developed jointly by East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA) and responsible agencies in local cities and Harris County. The City of Pasadena Office of Emergency Management is one of those responsible agencies. Using the e-Merge system, the city activates its community warning systems as needed in sections of the city that need to take actions such as sheltering in place. See Bengochea's **handout** showing the *CEC Handbook* protocols for events of different levels and lists the sirens, telephone, and television warning systems used by the city to warn the public in Pasadena.

Bengochea and Sheridan emphasized the importance of making sure you are signed up to receive emergency warnings and courtesy messages. The city uses Reverse 9-1-1 to ring down homes and businesses with warnings to shelter in place. The 9-1-1 system includes just land lines unless you add cell phone and Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) phone numbers. Go to [www.911.org](http://www.911.org) to do so. In addition, you may go to [www.ci.pasadena.tx.us](http://www.ci.pasadena.tx.us) to sign up with Nixle to receive text and/or email messages about emergencies and/or other city information. You may also go directly to [www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com). Sheridan said that each city has its own system for providing warnings and other information to the public, so it is important to go to that city's website to learn how to sign up. She also recommended signing up for messages in the cities and counties where you live, work, or are responsible for someone.

Pasadena ISD receives messages about emergencies from the city, its own police department, Nixle, sirens, AlertUS beacons, and radio. The district maintains a list of phone numbers and makes automated calls to parents and others on that list. They also use text messages, emails, their web page, and Twitter to communicate regarding a school emergency.

Bengochea's **slides** describe how the city and district would call for a shelter in place. Bengochea said the school district in particular will verify the need to shelter in place before calling for one to be sure the call to them was legitimate.

If PISD needs to telephone parents, the automated messages will be in both English and Spanish. The city is using Spanish increasingly in its emergency communications and materials. The attached Shelter in Place **poster** is in both languages.

The CAER Line number is 281-476-2237. New in 2014 is the ability to obtain the same information by going to [www.ehcma.org/caerline](http://www.ehcma.org/caerline).

CAER stands for Community Awareness and Emergency Response. The CAER Line was established by East Harris County Manufacturers Association in 1987 to allow community members to call for information about industrial events that concern them. *Emergency* information is in both English and Spanish.

The CAER Line is not a community warning system because you contact it, it does not contact you. It provides general information about events such as flaring, smoke, noise, odors, etc. Emergency messages are listed first. Plants posting messages may repeat warnings from the city to shelter in place but may also include information about road closures and other things that impact people but don't endanger them.

The CAER Line was formerly the home of the Odor Network, but the Odor Network was disbanded in 2013 in favor of the public calling Harris County Pollution Control Services 24-hour number-- 713-920-2831 -- to report a noxious odor.

**CAER Line Fact Sheets** are available in English and Spanish.