Phillips County residents can now self-register cell phones and email addresses to receive emergency notifications, announced Kenny Gaskill, director of Phillips County Communications Center.

About a year ago, the county purchased WENS, a Wireless Emergency Notification System. Gaskill said they use it to quickly dispatch first responders and other groups who may need to be aware of an emergency situation. In the past year, dispatchers have become comfortable using the system with first responders.

Now the county is ready to use WENS to notify the general public of emergency situations within the county, like weather emergencies or missing children.

The nearly 3,000 public landline numbers with “854” and “774” prefixes have been provided by PC Telcom and Haxtun Telephone Company and are automatically enrolled in the database.

Gaskill said they are now looking for those who wish to get alerts on their cell phones or emails to self-enroll in the system.

An online link is easily accessible on the Phillips County website www.colorado.gov/phillipscounty under the County Spotlight section on the home page. After clicking on the link, a registration page will appear where people can fill out their information, including their address.

To unsubscribe from alerts, go to the same link and follow the “unsubscribe” directions at the bottom of the page. If a resident wants to modify their account with a new address or different alert preferences, they must unsubscribe and then set up a new account.

The county website also has a question and answer section for assistance with the WENS sign-up.

To go directly to the registration page, type in http://entry.inspironlogistics.com/phillips_county_co/wens.cfm for English or http://entry.inspironlogistics.com/phil lips_spanish/wens.cfm for Spanish.

Anyone without Internet access can call the Phillips County administration office at 970-854-3778 for assistance.

County personnel will also provide assistance for emergency alert sign-ups at the next Mobile Food Pantry in Holyoke Wednesday, Feb. 6 from 9:30-11 a.m. at Phillips County Event Center and in Haxtun Wednesday, April 3 at Haxtun Community Center.

The County said emergency messages will be sent in English and translated for dispatch in Spanish as needed, the determination to be made on a case-by-case basis. All landline numbers already in the system are set to English by default.

Unlisted numbers must be self-enrolled in the database as they have not yet been entered.

When registering, residents have the option to sign up for various alerts. The local Communications Center will be sending out significant public health and safety alerts, such as a fire in one's neighborhood, a missing child in one's area, a shooting incident or a chemical spill. Other opt-ins include utilities (power outages and gas leaks), county road closures and traffic alerts.

The rest of the options are notifications from the National Weather Service about tornadoes, blizzards, floods, high winds, etc.

Those land lines already in the system by default will receive notification of significant public health and safety events or hazards. If a resident wishes to receive additional alerts, they will have to follow the "unsubscribe" steps on the website or call the administration office to modify

the account.

When setting up a new account for a cell phone, residents can sign up for text, voice or email alerts. They can choose all three, if desired. To sign up for both text and voice alerts, enter the phone number twice, selecting text on one and voice on the other.

Residents can also enter as many numbers as they need to for all the members of their family. Each account can have five phone numbers and two email addresses, so an additional account might need to be set up for the same household.

Residents must provide the name of their cell phone carrier, and if choosing the text option, will be subject to payment for that text according to the cell phone contract.

Gaskill said they know Viaero, Verizon and Sprint cell phones are working just fine. Other carriers or some pre-paid cell phones may block the text, in which case the resident should contact their carrier with questions.

When an alert is sent out, residents will receive a call from the number 970-854-2735. If they answer, they will hear a recorded message for the emergency notification. They can also follow the prompts to relisten to the message or acknowledge they received it.

Gaskill said the program records data about how many devices received the message and how many people replied to acknowledge they received it.

If the phone line is busy, the alerts will continue to send for a period of time. If the phone goes to voice mail, the recorded alert will be left as a message. Phones with complicated voice mail messages may not receive the alert (i.e. Press 1 for the operator, etc.).

Text messages will come from the number 69310.

Gaskill said he can select a certain geographic area using an online map, and only the addresses registered within that area will receive the alert, or he can send one to all registered users, depending on the situation. That is why it is so important to make sure the address is registered correctly.

People outside of Phillips County can also register and, for instance, sign up the address of their business located in the county or the address of an elderly relative so they can be aware of emergencies.

Phillips County reminds the public that no communication system is infallible. WENS is Internet-based, so there may be times an alert cannot be sent, but backup systems are in place, making it a dependable tool overall. Redundant systems of emergency notification including the outdoor siren system, telephone, email, text messages and external systems on commercial radio and TV stations or weather radios may be used to send out alerts as well.

Testing will take place the week of Jan. 21. Certain geographical areas will be chosen to be tested, such as Amherst, and the test will be clearly identified as such to those in the testing area.

For questions about this new emergency notification system, please call the Phillips County administration office at 854-3778.

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