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## Emergency info available by e-services

By: Kiersten J. Mayer , Staff Writer

Residents of Douglas County can get emergency management alerts on their Blackberries and cell phones along with notices about town meetings and public hearings.

Douglas County officials launched a Web-based information subscription service in July in response to a Douglas Board of County Commissioners' directive to improve public access to and receipt of timely information.

In addition to press releases, residents can subscribe to emergency alerts for any text-enabled device.

Douglas County is the first to have that option in Colorado, said Wendy Holmes, Douglas County director of communications.

The emergency management text alerts would have been helpful during last winter's blizzards, the flash floods in Westcreek and the gas leak in Highlands Ranch, she said.

County officials can text alerts with reverse 911 calls. Residents would have received text messages wherever they were.

"Not everyone has land lines and they work. If you're not at home, you're not going to get that reverse 911 call," she said.

The program allows for a limited number of characters in the text alerts, but they could direct people to a Web site for more information, she said.

"The key is to let them know that something has occurred that they need to pay attention to," said Holmes. "The Douglas County Sheriff's Office and the Douglas County Emergency management staff are very excited about the program."

Subscribers will receive timely updates at both an e-mail address and on a text-enabled device. The distribution of emergency alerts on cell phones, pagers and other text-enabled devices will be used for emergency communications or for other time-sensitive news to subscribers, according to a statement released by county officials July 23.

Subscribers may choose from more than 70 categories of information from all county departments, at no charge, and from the emergency management alert selection.

Topics include employment opportunities, information on town meetings, public hearings, business meetings, county commissioners' schedules, messages from elected officials, grant opportunities, citizen volunteer opportunities and topical updates on land use, water and transportation issues.

"This is both a cost-efficient and effective solution to improving communications with our communities and helps us disseminate information faster than we have ever had the means to do so before," said Steve Boand, Douglas County commissioner.

Boand and fellow commissioners Melanie Worley and Jack Hilbert called for the need to improve the public's access to Douglas County information.



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"We want to do more than just post information on a Web page and hope people see it," he said. "Now we can notify people when the information they want and need is available online."

This Web-based solution monitors the Douglas County and sheriff's department Web sites for content updates and notifies subscribers based on their personal preferences, containing the topic choices selected during registration, when updates are made to the Web sites.

The free automated e-mail subscription service is accessible from both the Douglas County Government [www.douglas.co.us](http://www.douglas.co.us) and Douglas County Sheriff's Office Web site [www.dcsheiff.net](http://www.dcsheiff.net).

Signing up for e-mail updates is free. Visitors to either Web site can click on the envelope, "Receive County Email Updates," icon at the top left of the home page to subscribe. Subscribers can change the pages to which they want to subscribe or cancel the service at any time.

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