Press Release

State of Maryland
Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

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DPSCS Announces Statewide
Community Escape Notification System

TOWSON, MD (October 28, 2009)---The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) today unveiled a comprehensive community escape notification system that allows people living near correctional facilities operated by DPSCS to receive automatic e-mail, phone, or text message alerts in the event of a escape.

Anyone interested in signing-up for notification may access the system by going to the DPSCS home page: www.dpscs.state.md.us. The link to the escape alert system is on the right side under "Online Services."

The system was purchased in March by the Division of Correction (DOC) from Avtex, Inc., a Minnesota-based company that has been developing community notification systems since the 1970s. Known as City Watch Online Notification System, the program is currently used across the country by law enforcement, local governments, and colleges and universities. It allows people to register online to receive emergency alert notifications on their cell phones, via email, or in the form of a text message. The new DPSCS application will allow people anywhere in the five-state region (Del., Md., Pa., WV, and Va.) to sign-up for the alerts.

"This is an outstanding and comprehensive way to notify the community," says DOC Commissioner J. Michael Stouffer. "Given the technological advances we have made in recent years, it's much better than a siren or whistle notification system, and reaches far more people potentially."

Currently, the Department uses a siren system and other forms of notification in various regions of the state, and those systems remain in place for now.

The new system will alert people by region, sending a message to those who have signed up. It will be activated by top executive staff in the DOC, and will also cover all non-DOC facilities operated by DPSCS, including Patuxent Institution in Jessup and the pretrial facilities in Baltimore operated by the Division of Pretrial Detention and Services.

DPSCS recognizes the need to be a "good neighbor" to those who live near its correctional facilities, and under Secretary Gary Maynard has reached out broadly to do so. Two years ago, the Division of Correction changed its inmate release policy, releasing inmates only in the regions where their approved home plans are effective. This means, for example, that only inmates who live from Frederick County westward will be released from Hagerstown.

Secretary Maynard has also dramatically increased the number of community projects in towns and cities all across Maryland. From Williamsport to Federalsburg, cities and towns are getting projects done thanks to inmate Public Safety Works crews that would otherwise not be accomplished due to budget or manpower issues.

www.dpscs.state.md.us
*The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services protects the public, its employees
and the detainees and offenders under its supervision.*

The Secretary and DOC Commissioner J. Michael Stouffer and their top executives have also reached out to communities across Maryland in other ways. Wardens, assistant wardens, and assistant commissioners, for example, regularly attend community crime watch and similar meetings. And Secretary Maynard has been a frequent guest and speaker before news media editorial boards and community organizations.

It should be noted that over-the-fence escapes are extremely rare. The Garcia-Ramos escape from MCI-H is the only such event to happen from a DPSCS medium- or maximum-security facility in the past six years.

ANSWERS TO SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Why the 'delay' in getting the system up and running?

The delay between the time of the Hagerstown escape and implementation was due to:
1.   Researching the available vendor offerings;
2.   Following Procurement policies;
3.   Setup;
4.   Configuration; and
5.   Waiting on the vendor to develop the ability to support user updates, rather than user registration updates having to be made centrally by an administrator. This would have greatly increased the overall cost of implementation.

Will the old siren/whistle systems continue to operate or be abandoned?

The new notification system is much more affordable than maintenance on the sirens and surpasses the sirens in features and effectiveness. The Jessup siren system will be discontinued. The use of the steam whistle in the Hagerstown Region will continue as long as it is operational.

How do people sign up?

Sign up Instructions:

1.   Open your web browser and go to the Department's home page: www.dpscs.state.md.us

2.   Click on the Escape Notification link located in the Online Services box. It can be found at the top, right of the page. You can also navigate directly to this page by typing http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/onlineservs/enr/index.shtml in your browser's address bar.

3.   Click on the desired notification region.

4.   Log in providing a user name and password.

5.   Complete and submit the registration page fields.

6.   If you want to register for multiple regions, please close the browser window and begin again.

MORE

What is the "lag" time before everybody in a region can be notified?

The text messages and emails are completed in a few seconds. The phone calls take longer. The vendor has 300 lines used for processing all their customer's events. If DPSCS is the only customer sending out an event notification, then the company can send 15,000 calls an hour for calls lasting 30 seconds.

Can people sign-up from way out of the region to warn their relatives who live near a prison?

Anyone can sign up for any region. On the registration page we even included our neighboring states in the drop down: PA, DE, VA, and WV.

Can people sign up for multiple-region alerts?

Anyone can sign up for multiple regions.

What does the system cost DOC?

The system cost for DPSCS includes a $7,500 yearly service fee. There are no additional fees for email and text messaging, but there is a .09 cent per minute charge after 10,000 allotted minutes per year.

Can people sign up for multiple forms of notification?

Citizens may sign up for email, text messaging and/or phone notifications.

What if a person's information changes? Is the system "updatable"?

The system is updatable by the users.

Are people going to be notified if the person is found, or should people just follow it in the media?

As stated on the web page, there is one notification to each notification format type, email, text messaging, and/or voice. After that initial notification citizens are told to follow the news story using their local news services.

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ers under its supervision.*