

REMINDER

Newspapers ♦ Yellow Pages

Publication: VERNON; Date: 2007 March 13; Section: Front Page; Page Number: 1

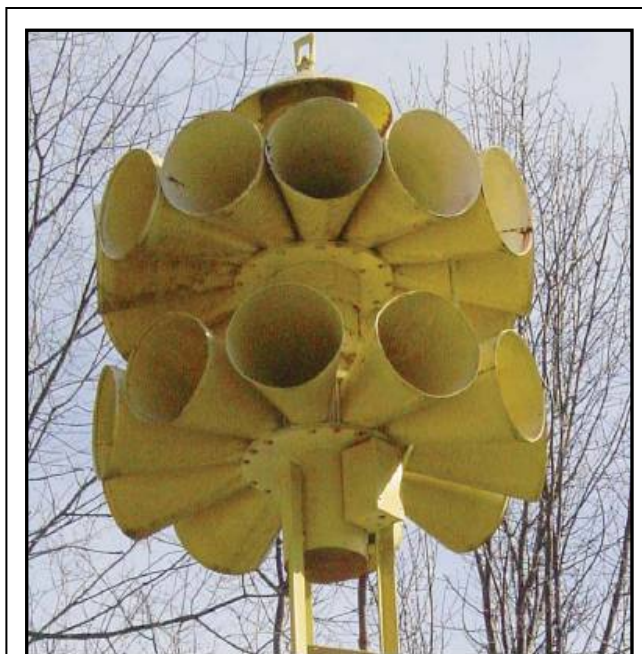
Vernon Siren System Prepared for Monthly Testing

By JESSICA CIPARELLI, Staff Writer

VERNON — If on Saturday, April 7, Vernon residents hear a three-minute siren blast throughout town, don't panic. The siren you hear could lead residents to valuable information in an emergency, but for right now, it's just going through monthly testing. It's been a long time since the sirens have been used. In fact, according to fire department radio communications officer Jack Fisher, those sirens used to be used to alert firemen, before pagers were used. "There are a few departments [in the state] that still use them for alerting firemen," said Fisher. "I've been on the fire department for 14 years, and they've [the sirens] been turned off before that," said Jon Andresen, a lieutenant, electrician and junior advisor for the VFD.

It's been four or five years since the sirens were last tested. The frequency they ran on was very similar to that of the fire and police dispatch frequencies, so there were frequent false alarms, but thanks to a Homeland Security grant, the system has been repaired. The cost is about \$5,000, most of which will come from the grant money. Repairs made include rewiring, and some sirens needed their controls replaced because of lightning strikes.

"It's a tried and proven way to alert the public," said Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro. "It's a simple and effective way to alert a large number of people all at once." Using digitally secure radio activators, a secure programmed code would activate sirens from selected hand-held radios in possession of Fire Chief Robert Kelley, assistant fire chiefs and deputy fire chief, Purcaro, and the Vernon Police Department dispatch center.



No way to miss these sirens. It's hard to miss the bright yellow siren system that sits atop Vernon Fire Station #141, one of several locations of emergency sirens. The sirens have sat idle for many years, but have been repaired, and testing will begin on the system on April 7. - Photo by Jessica Ciparelli.

When sirens go off in a time of emergency, the public has a way of finding out critical information without calling 911. When the sirens go off, log onto www.vernonprepared.com or call the dedicated 24-hour toll-free Emergency Management Information Line 877-762-7372, and press "option 1."

"It's critical that if residents have a real emergency, then they call 911, but if it's to get information, they have two ways to gather information that they didn't have in the past," Purcaro said.

Sirens are improved and ready to alert the public

Continued from page 1

Sirens are strategically placed at Fire Station #141 (near VPD), Station 341 (near Golf Land), Station 441 (on Nye Street), Dart Hill Road, and Tunnel Road. The siren's usage has some flexibility to it, but would be used in cases such as severe weather (i.e., hurricane-force winds sustained at 70 miles per hour or greater, or tornados visually confirmed and/or a tornado warning that puts Vernon in its path), Environmental hazards, such as a major toxic chemical spill or gas leak, or something that poses a threat to the health or safety of the residents of Vernon; Civil Defense, a situation defined by the Federal Government as a threat to national security and the safety of the public, or at the discretion of the emergency management director, fire chief or police chief. "Essentially, any time we feel there's an imminent danger to the public," said Purcaro. "Our goal is to save lives and property. Timely information for the public is critical."

Starting in April, the sirens will be tested monthly, in a three-minute blast, at 12 p.m. The monthly tests will continue on the first Saturday of every month. "It's important we do this test once a month," said Purcaro, to make sure everything is working properly in the case it's needed for a real emergency.

The sirens themselves are older, Purcaro noted, and their functionality and effectiveness will have to be assessed. "We will have to explore upgrading the sirens and expanding the system to ensure the entire town is covered over the next few years," Purcaro said. Fisher estimated it could cost \$30,000-\$50,000 to replace the entire system.

Purcaro noted that not just one form of communication is going to alert everyone to an emergency, so within the year, the town should be hooked up to a "Reverse 911" system, which was funded through state homeland security funds and is being rolled out by the Capitol Region Council of Governments for participating towns. Using GIS maps, emergency personnel would be able to select areas of town or the entire town to send out an emergency message through the phone lines. The town will be responsible for the Reverse 911 program's management, Purcaro said.

In non-testing scenarios, when the sirens go off, call 877-762-7372, option #1, visit www.vernonprepared.com, or, depending on the scope and nature of the emergency, check local radio and TV for the state's Emergency Alert System (EAS). The town's Office of Emergency Management will begin testing the sirens on April 7, the first Saturday of the month, and will continue to test monthly on the first Saturday of every month at 12 p.m.



Ready to implement. (l-r) Lt. Jon Andresen, Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro and Jack Fisher stand in front of Station #141 by the Vernon Police Department, where one of the sirens is located. Fisher and Andresen were both instrumental in helping Purcaro get the system back online again. - Photo by Jessica Ciparelli.

#