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Office of
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Smart Practices Spotlight

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Early Warning E-mail Network Buffalo County, Nebraska

Summary: *Concerned with the ability of the county's emergency warning system to adequately reach all its citizens, Nebraska's Buffalo County Emergency Management Office devised a simple solution that has taken on a life of its own.*

Situated in the heart of Nebraska, the town of Kearney is often subjected to severe weather. Although the town has an emergency warning system, county officials were concerned that workers in the town's three large metal-working plants would be unable to hear the warning sirens in the event of an emergency.

Searching for a solution, county officials developed a call-down phone tree to alert factory managers of potential severe weather, but the plan did not work very well. Then, Laurie Hardin, the county's emergency management coordinator, developed a simple but reliable system allowing officials to keep in touch with factory administrators, and thus the workers inside. Her solution? E-mail.

Since the Emergency Management Office routinely tracks potential severe weather via NOAA alerts, Hardin got the idea to cut-and-paste severe weather information into e-mails and send them to factory offices when there is a potential threat. Each factory has at least three people on the distribution list, ensuring that someone will be there to pass the message along in the event of severe weather or any other type of threat. The factories think the system is terrific and Hardin has now expanded the e-mail list to include not only other businesses, but individual members of the general community as well. Today, the e-mail list includes school superintendents, key officials and others throughout the county. As an advance warning system, this approach allows the emergency management office to take a pro-active approach to ensuring that people are warned about possible weather emergencies or other types of threats.

"It really amazed me how many businesses and offices were interested in our simple system," said Hardin. The industrial sector remains greatly appreciative of the county's efforts. Only recently, one factory provided a grant to the emergency management office to buy new NOAA weather radios. "If this system works here, as small as we are, it could work anywhere," said Hardin. "It helps to make emergency management more visible and is a great way to develop public relations. Businesses and individuals realize we're actively watching things and genuinely concerned about them."

Thinking Locally:

Are there sectors of your community that may have difficulty hearing warnings?
How can you assist these individuals?

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