

PERMIT (cont'd from p. 2)

If you are interested in learning more about how MyPermitNow can improve the permitting, code enforcement, and addressing processes in your city or county, please contact David Fowler, CAPCOG Senior Planner, at (512) 916-6165 or dfowler@capcog.org.

ENS (cont'd from p. 3)

Two years ago residents of the ten-county CAPCOG Region were given the option of receiving notification on their cell phones of emergencies that affect their homes and businesses. These notifications are made by participating local governments through the CAPCOG regional Emergency Notification System (ENS).

In 2004, responding to requests from members of the CAPCOG Homeland Security Task Force, CAPCOG used a combination of homeland security grant funds and funds from participating local governments to implement the ENS. This system allows public safety personnel in participating jurisdictions to relay critical emergency information to citizens when human life or property is in danger.

Originally, the system would contact only landline phones since it relied on the 9-1-1 database that is managed by CAPCOG. With the increased use of cell phones, fewer households maintain traditional phone service and rely exclusively on their cell phones as their primary phone. To address the need to extend the availability of emergency notification to individuals without landline phone services, CAPCOG staff worked with a programmer to develop a web-based interface that allows individuals to register their cell phone and locate their residence on a map, extending the functionality of the CAPCOG ENS to cell phones.

An additional benefit of this service is that individuals may link their cell phone number to one or more locations, such as their place of business or the homes of relatives. If a participating local government activates the system for an area that contains a location that has been registered to a particular cell phone number, the system will contact that cell phone.

The addition of this service is part of CAPCOG's ongoing efforts to ensure that the ENS is the most capable

telephone-based notification system possible. Earlier this year, the capabilities of the system were expanded to include the ability to deliver a larger number of calls per hour, providing local officials with more options for notifying their citizens of emergency situations.

For more information about ENS, contact Ed Schaefer at 512-916-6026 or eschaefer@capcog.org.

CAPCOG CONNECTIONS



A PUBLICATION OF THE CAPITAL AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

CAPCOG Responds to Bastrop County Fires

When wildfires burned over 34,000 acres in Bastrop County over Labor Day weekend, the county's partners across the CAPCOG region responded to provide manpower, equipment, and expertise. The fires destroyed over 1,500 homes and killed two people.

Bastrop County officials used the CAPCOG regional Emergency Notification System (ENS) to send nearly 4,000 emergency messages, warning residents to evacuate. CAPCOG's ENS enables emergency personnel in each of CAPCOG's ten counties to provide targeted, timely warning messages to landlines and cell phones.

In response to requests for assistance, members of the CAPCOG Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF), joined by personnel from the Capital Area and Centex Incident Management Teams (IMT) as well as CAPCOG staff, responded to the Bastrop Convention Center. The Convention Center was the location from which fire suppression and recovery efforts were coordinated for the two weeks immediately following the fires. At least 13 of the 26 HSTF members and other personnel from Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, Travis, and Williamson Counties responded assisting Bastrop County Emergency Management Coordinator Mike Fisher and his staff with a multitude of critical tasks.



As the fires were brought under control, the magnitude of the debris management problem began to be recognized. By one estimate, at least one million pine trees were burned. This was compounded by the destruction of homes and other buildings.

Kelly Freeman, CAPCOG's Solid Waste Program Manager, joined Bastrop County officials to begin organizing a coordinated response to debris management. Drawing on her prior experience with the Houston-Galveston Area Council, she provided critical insight into the logistical challenges of managing the large volume of debris and the maze of rules and regulations governing proper disposal.

Ed Schaefer, Director of Homeland Security, responded to the Bastrop Convention Center to support use of the CAPCOG WebEOC® installation. WebEOC® allows emergency response personnel from multiple jurisdictions to share critical information related to incident response. At the State of Texas' request, the CAPCOG system was made available to them to use in processing requests for state and federal assistance.

Eddie O'Connor, CAPCOG GIS Analyst, worked with Bastrop County GIS and CAPCOG Homeland Security personnel to make the county's GIS data, including the boundaries of the fire damage and the locations of destroyed homes, available to personnel logged in to the CAPCOG WebEOC® system.

2011 Jack Griesenbeck Leadership in Regionalism Award Applications Due

Regional cooperation is becoming increasingly more important to our communities as we work to address issues across city and county lines. The Jack Griesenbeck Leadership in Regionalism Award was created to recognize a volunteer, community leader, or elected official who has made a significant effort toward regional cooperation within CAPCOG's ten-county area.

Nominations are due by Nov. 1st (applications are on our website) and the winner will be announced at the December General Assembly meeting. Past recipients of the award are Kirk Watson, former Mayor of Austin; Neal Kocurek, former Chairman of the Envision Central Texas project; Robert Huston, Chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality; Ray Sanders, Lockhart Mayor and current Executive Committee member; Bob Daigh, District Engineer of Texas Department of Transportation; former Austin-area Senator Gonzalo Barrientos, and Caldwell County Judge H. T. Wright.

The award is named for the first chairman of CAPCOG, former Bastrop County Judge Jack Griesenbeck, who understood the need for regionalism. Judge Griesenbeck was the first chairman of CAPCOG in 1970 and also played a key role in the creation of the Texas Association of Regional Councils, the state association serving 24 councils of governments.

Capital Area Council of Governments

6800 Bureson Road
Building 310, Suite 165
Austin, Texas 78744

TEL (512) 916-6000
FAX (512) 916-6001

www.capcog.org

CAPCOG Management Staff

Betty Voights, Executive Director

Sheila Jennings, Deputy Director
Mike Jennings, Director of the Regional Law Enforcement Academy
John Rees, Director of Economic Development
James Mikolaichik, Director of Finance

Mark Sweeney, Director of Regional Services
Gregg Obuch, Director of Emergency Communications
Jennifer Scott, Director of Area Agency on Aging
Ed Schaefer, Director of Homeland Security
Chad Coburn, Director of Sustainable Places Project

First CAPCOG Jurisdictions Launching MyPermitNow

The San Marcos City Council approved the city's adoption of MyPermitNow last month as their permitting and code enforcement software. San Marcos is the second city to approve the purchase of MyPermitNow, joining Lago Vista, which approved the software earlier in August. Both municipalities plan to go live with MyPermitNow before the end of the calendar year. It is anticipated that by early 2012 up to 10 CAPCOG jurisdictions will have begun the conversion to MyPermitNow.

MyPermitNow is the main program in a suite of software programs that allows jurisdictions to track permitting, addressing, code enforcement, subdivision, and zoning review as well as a number of other municipal functions. Foremost among the features that have made MyPermitNow attractive to the area's jurisdictions is the program's web-based nature which allows applicants, officials, and staff to submit or review plans, print permits, make payments, or otherwise track or follow up on a project from any computer with an internet connection. As such, MyPermitNow eliminates the need for paper plan sets and should reduce the cost of permit review for both local governments and developers as well as for homeowners who apply for

permits. But perhaps most attractive about MyPermitNow is its simple pricing structure which charges based only on the number of permit cases generated while offering free setup, training, technical support, and program upgrades. This makes MyPermitNow more affordable than other



competing products, which typically charge additional fees for setup, support, and conversion to new software releases.

CAPCOG offers MyPermitNow through a cooperative agreement with the South Central Planning and Development Commission

(SCPDC), a regional agency based in Houma, Louisiana. SCPDC develops and supports MyPermitNow while also utilizing it in the field, thanks to SCPDC serving as their region's centralized permitting agency. CAPCOG has exclusive rights to market and distribute MyPermitNow in the Capital Area and adjacent regions in Central Texas. (See *PERMIT*, p. 4)

CAPCOG Provides 2010 U.S. Census Training

As a designated Census Information Center, CAPCOG continually works to disseminate U.S. Census Bureau economic and demographic information throughout the region. CAPCOG also provides training to local economic development planning staff on how to access and analyze U.S. Census Bureau information.

With the release of Census 2010 data, the U.S. Census Bureau unveiled a new tool to access demographic data, American FactFinder 2. In an effort to assist community and economic development personnel within the region, CAPCOG hosted a training session on American FactFinder 2. More



than 40 community representatives attended the two-hour session on 2010 Census data and American FactFinder 2. The training provided local officials and staff with the tools to download data and understand the applications and limitations of the data. The ability to access and utilize U.S. Bureau information is all the timelier with release of the most recent Census product.

In Sept., the U.S. Census Bureau released the results of the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS). Due to the elimination of the long form in the official 2010 Census, the 2010 ACS is now the county's most comprehensive source of information on such vital topics as income, poverty, education, occupation, employment, and housing.

Enthusiasm and Dedication to Service Formally Recognized at CAPCOG

Executive Director Betty Voights presented the first award to recognize CAPCOG staff enthusiasm and dedication to service. The inaugural David Partlow Award was presented to David Partlow, the longtime CAPCOG staff member after whom the award is named. Ms. Voights said "Regardless of the assignment or task, David would work tirelessly on the activity to ensure that CAPCOG's member agencies received the best assistance possible."

The effort and thoughtfulness David put into his work at CAPCOG was unparalleled. Though David is no longer employed with CAPCOG, the spirit of his service to the ten-county CAPCOG Region will live on through the annual presentation of the *David Partlow Award for Enthusiasm and Dedication to Service*.



David Partlow and Betty Voights

The 2010 ACS is particularly important, as it provides an unparalleled picture of the recession's impact at the first national, regional, and local level.

In order to accommodate individuals unable to attend the previous session, as well as provide an overview of the statistics contained in the 2010 ACS, CAPCOG will be hosting another U.S. Census Bureau training later this fall.

9-1-1 Centers Get Ready for the Nationwide EAS Test

On Nov. 9, 2011, at 1 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will conduct the first-ever, nationwide test of the Emergency Alert System (EAS). EAS alerts are transmitted over radio and television broadcast stations, cable television, and other media services. The purpose of this test is to assess the reliability and effectiveness of the system as a way to alert the public during nationwide emergencies. Although FEMA and the FCC are taking steps to ensure that broadcast announcements are made during the test, some people may not see or hear these announcements and, as a result, 9-1-1 Centers may receive calls. That is why both agencies are conducting various outreach activities to educate 9-1-1 Centers and other public safety agencies about the test. In addition, the FCC has established a website dedicated to the Nov. 9th test which can be found on the FCC website at www.fcc.gov/pshs.

In existence since 1994, the EAS is an alert and warning system designed to transmit emergency alerts and warnings to the public at the national, state, tribal, and local levels. EAS participants broadcast alerts and warnings regarding weather alerts, child abductions, and other types of emergencies. Although local and state components of the EAS are tested on a weekly and monthly basis, there has never been an end-to-end nationwide test or a national activation of the system. This simultaneous, top-down test of all components of the EAS on a nationwide basis will be conducted to ensure that the system will work as intended should public safety officials ever need to send an alert or warning to a large region of the United States.

On Nov. 9th at 1 p.m. CST, FEMA will transmit the EAS code for national emergencies. The EAS code and alert will be rebroadcast by broadcast stations and other service providers until it has been distributed throughout the entire country and U.S. territories.

What can local government agencies do to help? The FCC suggests a number of steps to prepare for the test. These include:

- getting the word out about the Nov. 9th test to state, tribal, and local 9-1-1 call centers, first responder agencies, and any other government agencies as appropriate;
- working with EAS participants in your state to ensure that your state's EAS Plan is up to date; and
- participating in monthly tests of your state's EAS.

Although the EAS test will be initiated by FEMA, local governments can use the test as an opportunity to educate appropriate public safety and other government officials and staff about the EAS, how it works, when it should be activated, and how to initiate an alert. Finally, the FCC asks local government officials to help inform residents within your jurisdictions in advance of the test so that they will know what to expect. Although the nationwide test will be similar to typical monthly and weekly tests, there will be some differences. Most notably, the Nov. 9th test will be longer – approximately three minutes – compared to the usual two-minute monthly test.

CAPCOG Benefits Counseling Program Gears Up for Medicare Open Enrollment

CAPCOG Benefits Counseling Program is gearing up for Medicare Open Enrollment beginning Oct. 15, 2011 through Dec. 7, 2011. Each year, people with Medicare have a broad array of health and prescription plans to choose from. This year, because of the implementation of the Affordable Care Act there are additional benefits and programs to consider. CAPCOG's Area Agency on Aging Benefits Counselors are part of the Texas State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) to educate, counsel, and assist Medicare beneficiaries. CAPCOG's Benefits Counseling Program allows Benefits Counselors to answer questions about programs such as Medicare, Prescription Drug Plans, Supplement Insurance, Social Security, and help narrow down the broad array of choices.

During this Open Enrollment period, CAPCOG staff and volunteers are helping individuals navigate the decisions

they are making. Benefits Counselors and volunteers are responsible for providing information, counseling, and assistance to Medicare enrollees on topics such as public and private health benefits, individual rights, legal issues, and consumer fraud. All residents of the ten-county CAPCOG Region aged 60 or older, as well as those who are Medicare-eligible regardless of age, are eligible to receive benefits counseling services.



To receive free one-on-one confidential counseling or to volunteer during the Open Enrollment period, ask for a Benefits Counselor when you call the Area Agency on Aging of the Capital Area: 1-888-622-9111 Toll free or (512) 916-6062 Austin local. More information can also be found at www.medicare.gov or on the 1-800-MEDICARE hotline.

Fires Increase Interest in Wireless Registration on CAPCOG Emergency Notification System

"Citizens interested in being notified of an emergency on their cell phones must register them with our Emergency Notification System (ENS); if someone has a landline phone, we have that," explained Ed Schaefer, CAPCOG's Homeland Security Director, who went on to explain that while registrations have been slow in past months, the recent wildfire outbreak resulted in 27,000 new listings!

Emergency personnel in six of CAPCOG's 10 counties—Bastrop, Burnet, Fayette, Hays, Travis, and Williamson—used the system to contact 9,025 phones in a two-day period. These included calls that were delivered to traditional landline phones and cell phones registered on the system. The messages delivered by the system ranged from notifications of a wildfire threat to the issuance of mandatory evacuation orders. (See *ENS*, p. 4)