

Automated Alert Network

The **Portland, Oregon** (529,100), Connect & Protect™ program makes it possible to send targeted emergency alerts and share critical information in real time among emergency management operations, first responders, critical infrastructure providers, and other public safety stakeholders.

Leadership/staffing

Connect and Protect is a joint venture by the city of Portland's Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC), which provides 9-1-1 services in Portland and Multnomah County, and Regional Alliances for Infrastructure and Network Security (RAINS), a public-private partnership that promotes the development and adoption of technology for homeland security.

Timeline

It took 16 months to develop and test the program, which was launched on August 20, 2003.

Budget/funding

BOEC was selected as the RAINS beta development site; other than staff time, there has been no cost to the city of Portland. Organizations joining the network contract with RAINS and jointly develop system enhancements.

Program description

The ultimate goal of the program is to help save lives or protect property through information sharing. Connect & Protect is a centrally managed, highly secure, wide-area network that offers a data-based communications bridge to organizations across the region. More than 100 local organizations are linked to Connect & Protect, including schools, public libraries, county transportation officials, security officers, county parole officers, private property managers, hospitals, hotels, and banks.

Information is sent automatically from BOEC's computer-aided dispatch system to Connect & Protect users, without any extra effort by 9-1-1 dispatchers. Other information sources can be quickly linked into the system. Individuals from participating organizations can check for incidents by monitoring a customized computer screen, which shows incoming alerts with links to news headlines, recently viewed documents, and a map of the region's earthquake activity. Participants also receive alerts by cell phone, e-mail, or pager. When subscribers log into the system, they see a map of the region indicating where the alarm has been activated. The user can then click on the alert to call up a more detailed map and obtain information on other active alerts in the region. When the user clicks on the alert a second time, a window comes up with information on the incident, including the time, address, severity level, status, and number of police units responding.

The system has strict security features to limit abuse of the warnings. For example, some categories of calls (e.g., reports of sexual crimes) are not transmitted publicly, and the alerts cannot easily be copied and pasted. Also, anonymous alerts are not permitted.

Results

More than 1.5 million alerts have been screened for publication by the system. In September 2004, the Connect & Protect program received the Mitretek Innovations Award in Homeland Security.

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