

County to implement alert system

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, October 16, 2015 9:24 am

JEFFERSON — Jefferson County is expecting to implement an Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) beginning in January 2016.

IPAWS, a program organized and funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is a warning system that will allow officials to quickly alert the public about serious emergencies.

“Currently, we don’t have a mass communication for Jefferson County for any kind of alerts,” Donna Haugom, director of the Jefferson County Office of Emergency Management, said. “This is Jefferson County’s first attempt at doing something like this. We would use it for (situations where people are at risk from) hazardous materials, to kick out tornado or severe thunderstorm warnings or watches. If there were a train derailment or something to that effect — those types of issues that we could work with.”

Endorsed by the State of Wisconsin, IPAWS uses the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio and other public alerting systems to send alerts from a single interface.

“The signal would be coming out of the sheriff’s department,” Haugom said. “It’s a software program that they would set up, integrated with the sheriff’s office. So we would have maybe three or four people who would be authorized to use that particular system. We would compose the message online, pass it on to FEMA and then FEMA would approve and kick it out.”

Alerts would be sent to cellular phones in geographically targeted areas within Jefferson County, even when cellular networks are overloaded and no longer able to support person-to-person calls, texts or emails.

“We can identify certain areas within the county that we can draw a polygon around,” Haugom explained. “We identify those people and one of the things it helps with is people that are passing through the area. They would know if something is happening in the area because it would hit their cell phone off of the cell tower. Whereas, if somebody was listening to a radio or television, the people traveling through wouldn’t hear those.”

Haugom began the application process for the alert system upon the passage of a resolution allowing Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier to enter into a contract with IPAWS provider AlertSense.

The resolution was passed Tuesday by the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors with a vote of 27-1. Supervisor Matthew Foelker voted against the resolution.

AlertSense, based in Boise, Idaho, specializes in mass notification and provides services to federal, state and local governments, university campuses, corporations and not-for-profit entities across the country.

“From a financial standpoint, it’s very expensive to (implement a mass alert system),” Haugom said. “This is a very reasonable solution to it at a reasonable cost, and it certainly helps with notification of any type of emergency or disaster.”

Haugom explained that a reverse-911 system, which has similar features as IPAWS, would cost roughly \$50,000 a year. AlertSense will be providing IPAWS to Jefferson County for an annual cost of \$2,250, the funds for which have been included in Jefferson County’s recommended 2016 executive budget.

“It’s something we can think about,” Haugom said. “We’ll utilize it for a year, see if its something that’s been beneficial to us — but I think it will be beneficial and it’s something that’s reviewable every year.”

Other Wisconsin counties authorized by FEMA to use IPAWS include Manitowoc County, Dane County Emergency Management, Winnebago County Emergency Management, the Ozaukee County Sheriff’s Office and the Wisconsin Emergency Management. Walworth County currently is in the process of being authorized for IPAWS use.

Meanwhile, the county board also on Tuesday:

- Unanimously authorized the negotiation of a contract with Advanced Disposal, previously known as Veolia, to provide refuse collection for Jefferson County.

The cost of 2016 refuse collection will be \$16,812, which will increase annually according to the annual fee schedule provided by Advanced Disposal. Funds will be budgeted in the 2016 budget and each year after.

- Unanimously accepted the 2015-16 state allotment of \$1,560 for Jefferson County from the County Conservation Aid for the South Central Region. The funds will be used to remove invasive plants at the Dr. J. S. Garman Nature Preserve in Waterloo.

- Accepted a bid of \$126,483.20 from Wolf Paving of Madison for construction of the Dorothy Carnes Park East Trailhead parking lot with a vote of 26-2. Supervisors Al Counsell and George Jaeckel voted against.

The project, to be funded using a Stewardship Grant of \$45,000, tax levy of \$75,000 and fund balance (remaining costs), includes construction of a 36-car parking lot, space to park two buses,

an entrance drive and site grading. The county's portion of construction costs are available in the 2015 Parks Department budget.

- Unanimously accepted the lowest of five bids — \$39,950 from Fort Atkinson-based Ready Electric — for a backup generator for Lueder Haus, an acute care facility for chronic mentally ill adults in Jefferson. Project funding is included in the 2015 Human Services Department budget.
- Unanimously approved the implementation plan for the Rock River Public Access Site of Cappie's Landing in the Town of Watertown. Implementation of the plan may occur as funds are made available by the county board or from other sources.

The Jefferson County Parks Department and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are working to manage the 6.6 acres of land, previously owned by Watertown Outboarders Inc., as a River-based Conservation Area.

With approximately 600 feet of river frontage, the area will provide non-motorized and motorized access to the Rock River and also will be developed and maintained to accommodate park-like day use opportunities.

- Unanimously passed a resolution supporting more severe criminal penalties for battery committed against child welfare and juvenile case workers.

Current law provides more severe penalties for "special circumstances battery" committed against certain government officials, employees and agents such as law enforcement officers, fire fighters and probation and parole agents. Proposed state legislation extends those provisions to a person who provides intake, depositional or other services relating to child welfare or juvenile justice.

- Unanimously passed amendments to two personnel ordinances.

The military leave procedure was amended to provide employees military leave without loss of pay for up to 10 days or 80 hours, whichever is less.

Also, to conform with the Jefferson County Smoke Free Air Act, the smoking policy was amended to prohibit the use of e-cigarettes and electronic delivery devices at any time in any county-owned, rented or leased building, including the Fair Park grandstand.