

KFPD Survey on Public Awareness of Emergency Public Address Systems

Dear Kensington Resident,

The Kensington Fire Protection District is considering whether to work with the County to install several Emergency Public Announcement (EPA) devices in the District to alert and assist citizens during emergency events such as wildfire, earthquake, and other imminent hazards. These devices would complement existing emergency warning systems such as CWS and Nixle. We would like your views on this issue, after explaining a few particulars. Please read over these FAQs and complete the following survey. Thanks!

FAQs

- 1. What system is being proposed?** -- We propose a system of several EPA devices, mounted on new poles, that would broadcast to Kensington in two ways: verbal announcements and instructions, and non-verbal blasts that can alert residents to dangers. Their speakers will be loud enough for most residents to hear in nearly any circumstance. They have the software capability to provide notifications through text and phone as well as through various social media platforms. And they have solar-powered batteries that can store electricity and remain active during an extended power outage.
- 2. Why do we need this system? Don't we already have County Warning System, Nixle, etc.?**
– We do, but we have learned from past emergencies in California that phone- and web-based warning systems don't reach everyone. Reverse-911 calls don't work unless you have a hard-wired landline with a corded phone, and increasingly these go out when the lights do. Extended loss of power and of cell tower reception – such as in a PG&E “planned outage” that could last a week or more -- renders your phones and laptops useless (this happened in Paradise and in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties), and so you may not receive CWS and Nixle warnings after a few days of outage. In contrast, the proposed systems have solar-powered storage batteries. They will work during planned PG&E outages as well as during cell tower outages in actual emergencies. And they will wake you at night when your phones are disconnected or out of reach. This system may not solve all problems, but we have to have alternatives in case of failure.
- 3. How will it work?** – All our emergency warning systems and monitors are controlled by a larger monitoring agency, the County Office of Emergency Services. Control of specific devices is local, and in Kensington would likely be activated through the OES by the KPD and the KFD. This proposed system, like some others, can be tailored for specific neighborhoods, such as for downed power lines after an earthquake. Siren blasts and verbal announcements about emergency conditions will allow residents to take appropriate action.
- 4. Will this be an annoyance in my neighborhood?** – We expect the devices to be mounted on new poles that can be made to look like trees, as for some cell towers. These are modern

devices that are relatively inconspicuous. Tests of the system are mostly internal, but if external they will be brief, infrequent, and at low volumes. No one living near one of these devices will be substantially inconvenienced in any way. And they will be safer in case of emergency.

5. How will I know what to do if one of these things goes off? -- The device will issue verbal instructions, but you will also be mailed a chart that tells you what non-verbal sounds mean and how to respond.

6. I thought we already had sirens. – No. When you hear a siren it may be from a refinery in Richmond announcing a shelter-in-place warning (usually for their local neighborhoods) because there is a HazMat situation; or it may be from UC Berkeley (noon, first Wednesday of every month) testing their system (which is both voice and siren). The City of Berkeley is purchasing a full EPA system of 15 or more devices, as is the City of Oakland. Mill Valley already has these EPA devices and they are very satisfied with them. The Southern Marin Fire District (everything below Novato to Tiburon) is following suit.

7. Why can't we just mount bullhorns and sirens on police cars and drive through the neighborhoods? -- It's been considered in Berkeley and it didn't work. Too few police cars (we have one or two on the roads, tops), too many roads (over 10 miles in Kensington), and not enough time to cover them. And car-mounted devices aren't strong enough to be effective at the scale needed for a civic emergency. Also, police will have other responsibilities.

8. What will these cost? Will it raise my taxes? – Costs vary by company and systems, depending in part on features and the number of devices needed. It is not foreseen that a bond to fund this type of system, if approved by the District and County, will be necessary. We are focusing on Federal and State grant programs to help, and we have a professional grant writer for this purpose. The District has made no decision on a specific provider, or even whether to acquire an EPA system. This is why we want your advice. Any such plan would need to be approved by the County, so if residents are clearly in favor, the County would be more likely to approve and cooperate, and we hope to contribute funding.

GO TO SURVEY

Name (to confirm Kensington residency): _____

Address (must be Kensington resident): _____

1. I have read and understand the information about sirens above: ___ yes ___ no

2. Please list any views, thoughts, questions or concerns that you still have:

3. Overall, what is your general preliminary impression of the proposal for an EPA system?

___ I'm in favor of it generally

___ I'm not sure; I need more information

___ I oppose the idea

4. Please check all of the following statements that apply to you:

___ I think we should install EPA devices as soon as we can

___ I'd like to know more but this sounds like a good idea

___ This could be too expensive; I think our existing warning systems are good enough

___ I don't think our existing warning systems are adequate and these could be very useful

___ I am concerned about these devices (noise, appearance, cost) and oppose them

5. If we could get a grant to cover most or all of the costs of these devices, would that change your view? If so, please explain how:

6. Overall, would you encourage the Fire District to acquire these warning systems for the community, as Berkeley and Oakland are doing?

___ Yes

___ No