

Expert Insights: Douglas County

When an at-risk woman went missing for more than 24 hours during the winter, the clock was ticking to find her. Unable to locate her, Douglas County Search and Rescue expanded the search area and used Everbridge SmartGIS for Citizen Alerts to get the community's help. A resident who received a message from the Everbridge system called to report seeing her. Thanks to the Everbridge system, we found the missing woman within an hour of sending the message.

Cory Friend
Communications Manager
Douglas County Sheriff's Office

Cory Friend, Douglas County, Colorado

Cory Friend helps dispatchers engage the community in finding people who are lost. On more than one occasion, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office dispatchers' quick actions in notifying the community using Everbridge SmartGIS™ for Citizen Alerts have helped bring a happy resolution to missing-person cases that might have ended differently. Whether getting the word out about missing persons, bear sightings, mudslides, or fire and flood warnings, the county's emergency dispatchers use the Everbridge system extensively to communicate with first responders, inform the community, and keep citizens safe.

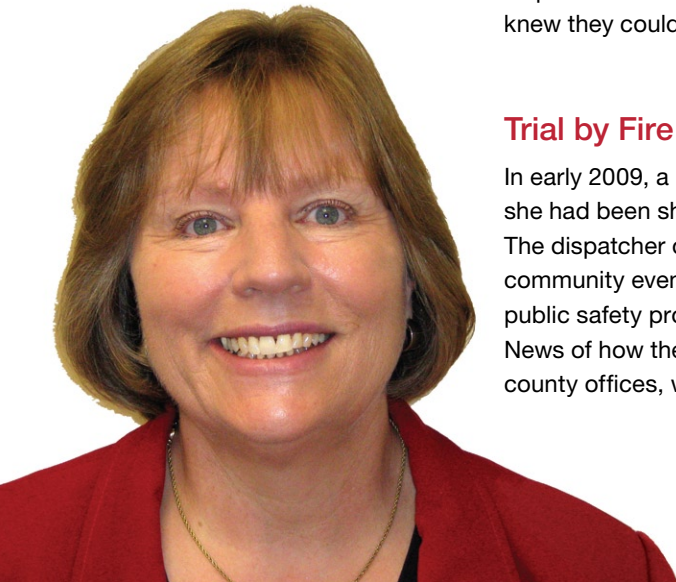
A county's communications manager helps dispatchers find missing persons using Everbridge SmartGIS for Citizen Alerts

Keeping Up With Citizen Trends

Communications manager Cory Friend saw a fast-growing trend within the 300,000-resident county: more and more citizens relying on wireless communication devices to access 911. "We needed a reliable system for our dispatchers that incorporated emergency notification to all wireless devices such as cell phones, pagers, and email to better meet the needs of our citizens," Friend noted. When the county's former notification provider made product changes that complicated the process for sending messages, Friend set out to find a better solution that included communication to wireless devices. With various county departments, three Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), and oversight by the 911 Board, collaboration across the county on the initiative was critical for approval and adoption. After narrowing the field to four competing solutions, Douglas County selected Everbridge as the clear leader. The county was impressed by the data integrity of the system, which the team felt was far superior to any other provider, a critical factor in selecting a system when dealing with sensitive 911 data protected by law. The dispatchers who would be using the system chose Everbridge for its ease of use as they knew they could have the system up and running with little training.

Trial by Fire

In early 2009, a home owner in Douglas County called local law enforcement to report that she had been shot and wounded by an armed intruder who escaped into the community. The dispatcher on duty at the Parker PSAP used Everbridge Aware to issue an alert to the community even though the county had not launched the system officially. Residents and public safety professionals were impressed by the speed and effectiveness of the alert. News of how the Everbridge system notified the community spread like wildfire throughout county offices, winning tremendous support for its rollout and use.



Peer-to-Peer: Cory's Advice

- Create internal guidelines concerning who is allowed to launch messages, under what circumstances, and what messages they should send. Working these guidelines into your processes will prevent your organization from sending too many messages and will make incident response much quicker and smoother.
- Create message templates for common incidents in your area. Keep language simple and direct to avoid confusion and ensure people take action as you intended.
- Splurge for on-site training. Although Everbridge provides excellent online training, tailored face-to-face training makes a big difference in giving less sophisticated users a greater comfort level with the system.

Finding a Missing Woman

At the end of February 2009, Douglas County Sheriff's deputies used the Everbridge Aware system to ask for the public's help in finding a missing woman who disappeared on a Friday morning from her home in Castle Pines Village. Her vehicle, keys, purse, cell phone, and medications were left at the house. Douglas County Search and Rescue was called in to assist in the search, but had not located any sign of the missing woman as of Saturday evening. With winter weather and mountainous wilderness just north of the missing woman's neighborhood, the clock was ticking.

Three geographically targeted notifications were sent to the community via landline and cell phones, text messaging, email, and pagers to employ residents' help in finding the missing woman. The first notification went out that Saturday at 7:11 pm, reaching the neighborhood's 800 residents within a minute. No one had seen the woman. As concerns for the woman's welfare mounted, county responders expanded their search the next day to include neighborhoods in the vicinity. At 2:36 pm on Sunday afternoon, a second message was sent to over 5,400 people in the surrounding areas. The response was immediate. As a direct result of the notification, a resident called authorities within the hour to report that he had found the woman in his backyard. At 3:44 pm, Dispatch sent out a final all-clear alert to the same 5,400 residents letting them know that the missing and endangered woman had been found safe and uninjured.

 Message - February 21, 2009 7:11 PM

The Douglas County Sheriff's office is looking for a missing endangered 32-year-old female described as a white female with blonde hair, five foot five inches tall, slender build. Last seen in the area of Castle Pines. If seen, please call the Douglas County Sheriff's office at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Expanding Usage Across the County

Douglas County's numerous community successes using Everbridge Aware have attracted attention from organizations across the county who would like to leverage the system, including the fire department, various towns and cities, and law enforcement, which is planning to use Everbridge for its Patrol, SORT, and SWAT teams. Friend is currently working with neighboring counties to put processes in place that will enable other cities and PSAPs to leverage the Everbridge system for incidents that cross county lines, requiring a coordinated response.

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