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Province developing 'reverse 911' system

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CHARLOTTETOWN - P.E.I.'s Emergency Measures Organization is planning to launch a new warning system. The decision follows last week's devastating storm - Tropical Storm Juan hit the Island leaving millions of dollars in damage behind.

It is called a community notification system - a small box that looks like an answering machine which hooks up to your phone. In the case of an emergency, a warning would sound in your home, and a text message would flash on the screen.

"In that thing there is pre-programmed messages which might say that there is a hurricane and then the scrolling (text) would give you more information including possibly a phone number for you to call to get more information about the threat and the level of threat to you," explains EMO's Dave Campbell.

The technology behind the system is dubbed "reverse 911." Computers would use phone numbers and address information in the 911 system to send out the messages.



People would hook a box like this one to the phonenumber

Similar systems are in use in a number of communities in North America. They are being used for everything from announcing emergency warnings to school closings, and even warnings about road construction detours.

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"In the case of Juan where this came at us very quickly and we didn't have a whole lot of advance warning of the severity, once we got an idea of that severity we could put that out. Even if the power is gone down these units would still be functioning and so would our phone system."

The province is working with Industry Canada and Aliant on the project. One part of it needs federal approval from the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission.

Campbell says it will take at least a year for the project to come together.

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