

Weather warning system a first

By LENDL RYAN

TOWNSVILLE City Council is the first council in Australia to sign up to a disaster warning system to advise residents of a severe wild weather event.

It will allow the Local Disaster Management Group to send alerts via mobiles, landline phones, pagers, and email accounts to those in the path of a cyclone, a damaging storm, tsunami, flash flooding or bushfires.

It is the system that was offered free of charge to the Victorian Government ahead of the fatal Black Saturday bushfires but foolishly rejected.

Mayor Les Tyrell said the Early Warning Network was a must to protect residents from the wrath of mother nature.

"It is another way of people keeping abreast of disasters throughout the season," he said.

"We can't rely on people during the night for example to watch TV or listen to the radio to become informed about what is happening.

"I think this is something that has the possibility to save lives, to save damage and it is something that we are very proud as the first local government in Australia to put it in place."

The messages will be sent only to residents who register for the service due to privacy laws.

Methods of notification include text messages on mobiles, recorded messages on landline phones or email.

It will cost council about 12c per message.

Cr Tyrell said the messages would target residents who lived in locations which faced a direct and imminent threat of a natural disaster such as a cyclone, hailstorm or bushfire.

"We won't be issuing an alert every time a cyclone is hovering off the Queensland coast, but if the information we receive indicates a particular area of the city is likely to be affected, then we'll issue advice on actions people should consider," he said.

"If you look back at last year – we had to evacuate people from Bushland Beach due to an approaching cyclone.

"In 1998 in the floods we could have advised people in Bluewater that there was a major flood coming their way."

The council's Community Safety and Health Committee chairman Cr Dale Last said the move followed talks between State and Federal Governments which are yet to produce a national warning system.



Townsville Bulletin
Tuesday 6/10/2009

Page: 6

Section: General News
Region: Townsville QLD
Type: Regional

Size: 260.52 sq.cms.

Frequency: MTWTFSS-

"There's no point waiting around until a national system is developed, as it could be years away," he said.

"The Victorian bushfires and other disasters in recent years have only served to emphasise the need for such a system, and given there's already a private sector service available, we think it's in the interests of the community to use it.

"Getting an immediate message out to the community can be difficult, particularly during the night, however this system will give us a better chance of doing exactly that."

Early Warning Network managing director Kerry Plowright said the system had been operating since 2007 and was the world's only location-based early warning service for severe weather.

"We use a number of resources to forecast, analyse and monitor natural disaster risks, including the Bureau of Meteorology, Weatherzone, meteorological discussion boards, the Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and many more," he said.

To register for the service visit www.townsville.qld.gov.au or call council's Customer Service Centre on 4727 9000.