

# COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM POLICY

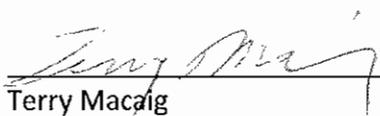
Town of Williston

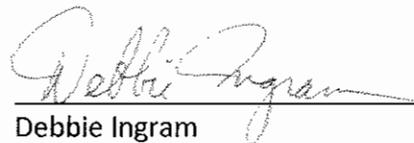
Williston Selectboard

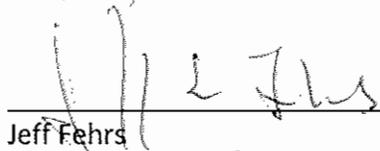
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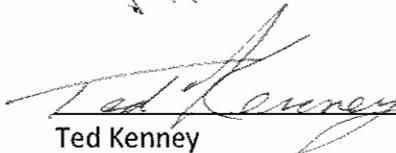
The foregoing Policy is hereby adopted by the Selectboard of the Town of Williston of Williston, Vermont, this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of May, 2016 and is effective as of this date until amended or repealed.

  
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**Abstract:** This policy is intended to establish uniform rules and procedures for utilizing the VT-Alert System for community, group, or media notifications by Town staff.

## **1. PURPOSE**

This document is intended to establish uniform rules and procedures for utilizing the VT-Alert System for community, group, or media notifications concerning emergencies and other information town officials may deem appropriate for broadcast.

## **2. POLICY STATEMENT**

The appropriate use of information technology is an important concern for all employees, elected, and appointed officials of the Town of Williston. An emergency notification system can be valuable in informing citizens to dangerous situations or threats to their health or safety. However, in order to maximize the impact of emergency messages, it is important to follow consistent practices on the use of that technology. This policy is an overall guideline for the use of the VT-Alert System by all authorized users of the Town of Williston.

## **3. DEFINITIONS**

- a. VT-Alert System – The VT-Alert System is a web-based system which provides a portal by which information can be disseminated to the public, the State Emergency Operation Center, State Support Functions, Federal, State, and Local governments, schools & Universities, and First Responders.
- b. Emergency Alert – An emergency alert is an urgent communication warning upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving imminent or immediate threat to the health or safety. Emergency alerts are sent via the VT-Alert System.
- c. EAS/ALERT Message – a message sent to people in a geographic area, including civilians who set that area as a location of interest and (if specified) all mobile and landline phones in the area.
- d. Notification Group (Employees) – set of employee users assigned to a private group
- e. Group Notification – message sent to a notification group of civilian accounts according to their contact information
- f. Notifier – a person selected, trained, and assigned to create, modify, or delete notifications from within the VT-Alert Notification System
- g. Administrator – a person selected, trained, and assigned to manage users, develop templates, and develop policy surrounding the use of the VT-Alert Notification System.

## **4. USES OF ALERT SYSTEM**

- a. The VT-Alert Notification System will be used to notify users of emergency situations that may threaten the health, safety or property of citizens. Examples include, but are not limited to:
  - Significant traffic delays;

- Road closures;
  - Traffic detours;
  - Emergencies;
  - Public Infrastructure interruptions such as water main breaks, wastewater system disruptions or other related incidents.
  - At risk missing persons; and
  - Other major public safety incidents
- b. Unless there is a substantial risk to public safety and there is some sense of immediacy, notifying residents by phone call should be avoided. Notifications should be done to email, web, and by text.
- c. Emergency alerts should not be used as a general bulletin notification, but reserved for significant events or situations that affect a substantial number of community members or the public at large. Situations that affect the entire state or a region larger than Williston should be disseminated by the Vermont Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.

## **5. PROCESS FOR ISSUING EMERGENCY MESSAGES/ALERTS**

- a. Emergency alerts may be issued based on the approval of a department supervisor or officer in charge, department head, Town Manager, or Emergency Management Director.
- b. The Town and all appointed users of the system will abide by the VT-Alert Notification System rules, regulations, policy, and procedures as promulgated by the Vermont Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.
- c. Emergency messages/alerts are delivered to subscribers based upon subscriber preferences (email, text, phone, etc). Because these messages are delivered in this manner, it is essential that the messages sent maintain a level of importance to subscribers and are not seen as unwarranted or "junkmail".
- d. Although not mandatory, each department is encouraged to develop at least one department specific template for use by their department to expedite creation of an alert message.
- e. All alerts sent shall have information in the alert that points community members to a location where they can obtain additional information, updates, and the status of the original alert. It is recommended that no additional alerts be sent out to update community members unless the alert needs to be extended beyond the original duration of the emergency/event or there is a significant change concerning the subject of the alert.
- f. When a notification is sent, Notifiers should mark the applicable box to have the alert posted to the State of Vermont VT-Alert website.

- g. The Town will identify and appoint key personnel as Administrators and Notifiers. At a minimum, at least one member from the police, fire, and public works departments shall be appointed as a Notifier.
- h. Person(s) appointed as Administrators will be responsible for encouraging community members (civilian users) to sign up for receiving notifications, add/change/remove users, develop message templates, and act as a liaison with the Vermont Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. At a minimum, the person assigned responsibility as the Town Emergency Management Director shall be assigned as an Administrator.
- i. Person(s) appointed as a Notifier for VT-Alert will be responsible for creating and publishing notifications to the community or other groups.
- j. Both Administrators and Notifiers must have accounts in the VT-Alert system. Administrators will notify the VT-Alert system administrators to add new users for either of these positions.

## **6. PRESS RELEASES**

- a. The system is set up to broadcast press releases to subscribers who elect to receive VT-Alert press releases.
- b. Press releases should concern significant events that are of substantial importance to subscribers.
- c. Departments should not utilize the press release for general information release. Notifiers posting press releases should utilize the examples in Section 4 above to guide the types of information to be sent.

## **7. DEPARTMENTAL GROUP NOTIFICATION MESSAGING**

- a. The VT-Alert Notification System is set up to be used as a department wide or Town employee wide notification system for contacting employees for department purposes or emergencies.
- b. Notification Groups have been created to minimally cover public works, police, and fire; however other departments may utilize this segment of the system for notification purposes.
- c. Each department should establish their own specific guidelines for using this system of notification for different groups of employees.
- d. Examples of acceptable use could be, but is not necessarily limited to:
  - Employee call outs for emergencies
  - Group notifications for specific department incidents/events