

"TEMECULA RADIO GOES LIVE"

By NICOLE SACK - Staff Writer

TEMECULA ---- Maybe somewhere among the classic rock, sports-talk radio, smooth jazz or pop radio stations, residents will be able to fit one more station into their preprogrammed radio lineup: the city's Emergency Advisory Radio System at AM 1610.

While it isn't everyday listening, the radio frequency is meant to be the place residents can tune into when the world appears ready to go upside down. The radio station will instruct residents about school incidents, flash floods, earthquakes, Amber Alerts, fires and other emergencies.

The station went live earlier this week, said Tim Thorson, Temecula's information systems director.

"We want to get people familiar with the station as a resource during an emergency," Thorson said. "We're still working on creating programming during nonemergency periods, but that still has to be worked out."

The station will give the city's staff the ability to prerecord messages and quickly create broadcasts for emergencies. Newly recorded messages can be inserted into the broadcast by telephone or the Internet. The station will also offer "live" broadcast capabilities.

Additionally, Temecula's station is designed with an exclusive encoding system that recognizes all National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration event codes, which will allow the local station to rebroadcast weather information relevant to the area.

Right now, there is a lone voice on the channel.

It belongs to Margie Casey, an administrative assistant for the city's information systems department. During a continuously looped 30-second message, Casey welcomes listeners and notifies them of the station's purpose. Her voice is also what callers will hear on the city's emergency citizen's hot line.

The radio station joins the city's emergency notification systems, collectively called, "Temecula Alert," that include Reverse 911; telephone hot line (951) 506-5111; the city's Web site, www.cityoftemecula.org; and TV Channel 3.

During nonemergency times, the city can use the radio station to inform residents about a wide variety of things including street repairs, travel advisories, public notices and visitor information. Messages will be informative and noncommercial, city officials say.

The transmitter is on top of the Temecula Public Library on Pauba Road. From that location in the center of the 27-square-mile city, a radio signal will transmit within a 3-mile to 5-mile radius, encompassing the city.

The decision in April to spend \$20,000 to deliver up-to-the-minute news and information during emergency situations in the area was prompted by last October's wildfires. Then, many Southwest County residents were alarmed at the lack of information available about fires raging just beyond the county's borders with San Diego and Orange counties.

Residents of Temecula requested that the city investigate expanding cable television programming and radio coverage to include local events ---- not just news on occurrences in Los Angeles and San Diego.

In response, an external communications subcommittee was formed, consisting of City Council members Jeff Comerchero and Maryann Edwards.

But there is still work to be done, such as involving the city's students in some of the broadcast programming. Edwards said it will be one of the discussions raised at the joint City Council and Temecula Valley Unified School District meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. Sept. 23.

"The hope is that maybe we can get the kids involved, since we have broadcast studios at most of our schools," Edwards said. "There are thoughts of using the station for school sports and football. Once we get a bag of tricks, the content will be more interesting."

Edwards said that in light of how slowly the wheels of government typically move, the genesis of the city's emergency station was rather quick.

"This was such an easy and inexpensive solution to the problems we encountered during the fires," she said.

