

Emergency alert legislation heads to first State Senate committee hearing Tuesday

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA – With the six-month anniversary of the North Bay fire storm arriving on Sunday, new legislation setting statewide emergency alert protocols is heading to its first official Senate committee hearing on Tuesday.

“The size and scope of wildland fire events in California are only getting worse. It’s clear there are significant shortcomings in our emergency alert system and residents deserve timely notifications and up-to-date information,” said State Sen. Mike McGuire. “Lives depend on the Legislature and governor taking swift action to ensure statewide emergency alert standards are adopted, training is implemented, and funding is secured to ensure communities big and small have reliable alert systems deployed.”

SB 833 was introduced by Sen. McGuire, along with joint authors Senators Bill Dodd and Jerry Hill, and principal co-authors Assemblymembers Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Marc Levine and Jim Wood.

The bill will create statewide emergency alert protocols for the first time in California history.

There are several different emergency warning systems available to counties that alert residents through cell phone calls, text messages, and landline recordings.

Some systems require residents to “opt-in” to the alert notifications, and others have limitations on how they can be targeted in specific areas.

SB 833 will require every county in California to adopt the up-to-date wireless emergency alert system with trained operators who can implement an evacuation order using the alert system (or a state sanctioned equivalent system).

The legislation also will set out standards for when counties should use the system, mandate annual training for emergency managers on how to best utilize the system, require that alerts be sent out via landline telephones and mobile phones along with other communication mediums including radio, television and electronic highway billboards, facilitate communication between counties and the state at the start of a disaster, and create guidelines and protocols for when and how the alerts should be sent.

The legislation will also mandate that all emergency alert systems be opt-out, no longer

opt-in.

During the October 2017 Firestorm, thousands of residents in the path of the fires didn't receive any notifications or emergency alerts.

The fires destroyed more than 6,000 homes, scorched more than 170,000 acres, caused billions in damage, and resulted in the death of more than 40 residents.

Santa Rosa Fire Chief Tony Gossner will testify in support of SB 833 Tuesday, which will be heard in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Supporting SB 833 are the California Fire Chiefs Association; California Professional Firefighters; Fire Districts Association of California; California Ambulance Association; League of California Cities; Rural County Representatives of California; City of Santa Rosa; County of Napa; County of Sonoma; Marin County Council of Mayors and Councilmembers; and the Redwood Valley Municipal Advisory Council, among many other groups.

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