

New system helps alert residents to emergencies

Town moved to tap technology after Sept. 11, 2001, attacks
By Paul Gately, Standard-Times correspondent

ACUSHNET — The five-year anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks passed quietly in town, but the events of 9/11 prompted the community to invest in an Internet-based Reverse 911 emergency-based notification system.

Town Administrator Alan Coutinho and Police Chief Michael Alves have negotiated a contract with Direct Connect CTY of Boston. Selectmen said the firm's notification system will cost \$3,000 to \$5,000.

"I'd say this is a direct result of the attacks," selectmen Chairman Michael F. Brown said. "There's no hardware. The messages go directly to a computer or telephone. The system will be operable from any computer."

Mr. Brown said the town has yet to devise policies on using the system. He said it must be determined who will send emergency messages, but he hopes individuals will be designated in the town's major departments, including public safety, public works, town hall and perhaps the council on aging.

"We hope any department can have access to it," he said. "But with verification through the town administrator's office. Every department should be able to use it when they need to."

The individuals typing and sending emergency messages will depend on the nature of the issue arising, Mr. Brown said. Messages can go to home telephone numbers, cell phone numbers or e-mail accounts. He said residents will be asked in time how they want to be contacted.

The messages could be as mundane as school being closed due to snow, the nature of Main Street repairs or the arrival of a hurricane. There might be routine calls to home-bound elderly to check on their well-being.

Bourne is setting up a telephone-based Reverse 911 system at police headquarters in Buzzards Bay. The town is compiling cell phone numbers and the home numbers of seasonal residents who live elsewhere most of the year.