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Skagit Valley Herald

Dial-a-flood coming

MOUNT VERNON – Dial-a-Flood is coming soon to Skagit County.

Yesterday the Skagit County Commissioners, on prompting by a citizen, authorized creation of a telephone service by which county residents could call to get flood information.

The phone line would serve as a early warning system, giving the reports by the weather bureau of the expected flood level and reports of the rising river at Concrete. If the Skagit River reaches flood stage at Concrete, Mount Vernon area residents have about 12 hours before the flood reaches them.

In the past, county residents would have to call the county engineer's office during flood time to find information. The proposed recorded phone service is expected to make flood information easier to obtain.

The action by the commission follows the appearance of High Hopes Hog Farm owner Larry Kunzler last week, who asked that an early warning system be installed to let farm owners know well in advance that a flood is coming, so they can move livestock to higher ground.

Kunzler specifically asked that flood warnings be broadcast to the county residents by sounding fire sirens for one-half hour. But according to emergency services director Joseph Cain, the fire chiefs he contacted this last week were unwilling to do that, since it would burn out sirens. Also, volunteer firemen would come to the station the instant the siren sounded, Cain stated.

Cain will be purchasing one phone and one tape recorder at present, but the commissioners indicated they wanted four phones and recorders in use in time for the next flood season.

Installation cost of all four phones was estimated at \$115, with a \$16 monthly flat rate. Cost of the four tape recorders was estimated at \$600.

Commissioner Jerry Mansfield pushed for the installation of a 9-1-1 emergency number. By dialing this number, county residents can get connected to any emergency service agency they need, instead of having to waste time going through the operator.

Cain stated that jealousy between the fire and police departments has hindered creation of such a service.

In other county business, the commissioners authorized Regional Planning Council Director Ian Munce to further research grant opportunities for the county through the federal Small Cities program. These grants, primarily aimed toward low and middle income families, provide funds for such things as low income housing.