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Contact: Office of Communications
Phone: (601) 359-5289, 359-5608, 359-5689
E-mail: MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us

South Mississippi prison plans to test mass notification system Thursday

JACKSON – South Mississippi Correctional Institution tested its new mass notification system for keeping residents informed in case of an emergency at the prison Thursday in Leakesville.

All landlines and cellphones in Greene County should receive a call. E-mails and text messages will be sent to cellphones as well. The message will begin as “This is a test” similar to what is used for weather and amber alerts.

“This is an important tool to keep people informed who live near or are traveling near the prison should we have an emergency situation in the future,” Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said. “We are committed to maintaining public safety, and we take that responsibility seriously.”

SMCI Superintendent Joe Errington said the mass notification system has been planned since August 2018 in combination with an advisory committee, including local officials, which started meeting in September.

“Anyone who uses a communication device whether it is a cellphone, regular phone, or an e-mail, you should receive the test broadcast, if you are in Greene County Thursday morning,” Errington said.

Errington said the system is capable of more than just broadcasting an alert. It also has a two-way communication feature. “If we have a situation, such as an escape, people who receive the alert can also text or call back from their location to provide information they may have that could help us,” Errington said. “If they see or hear anything, we would have people on standby to receive that information.”

The mass notification system draws from several databases, including the county’s 911 system, to reach all phones in Greene County. Anyone traveling through Greene County at the time of the test should receive an alert on his or her phone.

After the test, Errington said there will be a tabletop exercise to discuss and evaluate responses to different scenarios.