

# Wide Area Notification System

## What is the Wide Area Notification System?

The Wide Area Notification System (WANS) is a 24/7 rapid emergency notification system capable of notifying specific groups of emergent public health issues. The Department of Public Health purchased Command Caller by Voice Technologies Inc. for its WANS. Command Caller is primarily a computer based autodialing and voice messaging system. The software can contact a large number of individuals by telephone in a relative short period of time. Command Caller can also contact individuals via email, fax and pager.

## What is the WANS used for?

The WANS is used to notify key personnel to respond to a drill or a public health emergency. Disease outbreaks, bioterrorism, chemical spills, radiation, severe weather, etc. are all possible reasons for a WANS notification.

## How are individuals contacted?

Individuals are contacted by telephone. Command Caller currently uses up to four different telephone numbers when attempting to contact individuals. Calls are placed in sequence to an individual's DPH Nextel phone, personal cell phone, work phone, and home phone. Calls are placed at roughly one-minute intervals. If all four phones are not answered, Command Caller will continue to call for a maximum of five times. If an answering machine is encountered, Command Caller will leave a message on the first call and count the call as incomplete and continue calling numbers. Subsequent calls to the answering machine will not leave any messages. Once a call has been answered and a response provided, Command Caller will cease calling.

## What do the messages say?

All WANS messages start out with the recorded phrase, ***"This is a very important message from the Connecticut Department of Public Health"***, which is followed by a message about a test, a drill or an actual public health emergency. All WANS messages will include a phrase, at the beginning and at the end of the message indicating the type of message (e.g. ***"This is a test"***, ***"This is a drill"***, ***This is an emergency***" etc.). Messages about actual events or emergencies that require a specific response may start with the phrase ***"This is not a drill"***.

The type of emergency or drill determines the content of messages and which groups get notified. A typical drill message example would be: ***"This is a drill. You are being notified of an emergent public health issue, no response is required at this time. Please follow the prompts at the end of this message. This is a drill."*** An Alert message example is: ***"This is not a drill". You are being notified of an emergent public health issue. Call 555-5555 for further information. Please follow the prompts at the end of this message"***.

When listening to a WANS message it is important that you do not attempt to talk during the message or have loud noises in the background. Command Caller will sometimes interpret talking and loud noises during message delivery as the presence of an answering machine and will reset its current message to the answering machine message. Please see "What does

Command Caller do when it reaches an answering machine?” for more information about answering machines.

**What type of response is required?**

During emergencies or drills the messages will provide instructions for a recipients response. The instructions can include: locations to report to, Phone numbers of places to call, websites to get information, etc.

All drill and alert messages end with the following phrases: “Please follow the prompts at the end of this message. If you are able to respond, press 1. If you are not able to respond, press 9.” Pressing 1 indicates your availability to participate in drill or emergency related activities. During any WANS notification, it is important to listen to the whole message and then indicate your response. Responses are monitored to determine the number of individuals able to respond and to identify responders. Responding with a “1” or a “9” completes a notification call and causes Command Caller to cease calling.

**What does Command Caller do when it reaches an answering machine?**

The presence of an answering machine is determined by measuring the delay between telephone-pick up and voice actuation. This delay is longer for machines than for humans. Individuals who do not answer their phone quickly enough may receive the answering machine message. The answering machine message is the same drill or alert message but without the response options. During actual emergencies, answering machine messages will provide instructions and contact information for responders. Messages about drills and tests generally will not provide further contact information. If the message left on the answering machine is recent (within the last 20 minutes), a response may be supplied when Commander Caller calls back again.

**How can I respond to garbled and/or incomplete messages?**

If you receive a garbled or incomplete WANS message, please wait for Command Caller to call again. If the message was received on a cell phone, you can try moving to an area with better reception or go to one of your other phones. Response to test and drill messages more than an hour old will be considered missed calls.

**Can someone else answer your call?**

WANS notifications should only be responded to by the intended recipient of the notification. Relatives and staff answering phones should be aware of and understand WANS notifications. An approved staff member may fill in for the primary respondent when he or she is absent.

For more information, please contact **Peter Mitchell** in Local Health Administration Branch at **860 509-7798**.