

Enhancing Public Health Employee Communication with Text Messaging

1 BACKGROUND

- Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) is one of the largest public health departments in the country
- PHSKC employs nearly 1500 employees at 40 sites
- PHSKC serves 1.9 million residents
- **Public Health employees are essential to the health and safety of the public during an emergency**

2 WHY TEXT IN AN EMERGENCY?

- Cell phones can be used during power outages
- Network overloads make texting more reliable than voice calls in an emergency
- People have their phones with them almost all the time
- Fast, simple messages can be sent to many people



3 WHAT MATTERS TO PEOPLE? PHSKC assessed the types of information that would be most relevant to employees. This feedback informed the pilot program.

50 % of employees responded to a survey about texting (n=828)

54% of respondents wanted to receive texts for building closures

55% of respondents wanted to receive texts about emergencies

Many expressed concerns about employer "spamming" with texts

5 PILOT & SURVEY

- In January 2012, a snowstorm hit King County causing power outages, closures and delayed start times over several days
- PHSKC sent 15 messages over 5 days to all enrolled employees
- Half of employees enrolled responded to post-storm survey

SAMPLE MESSAGE: Ice storm. Roads dangerous. PHSKC on late start at 10. If not critical staff check with supervisor before coming. Check web and hotline

- 83% said the messages were fairly or very relevant and helpful
- 70% received a text message alert before they heard about the information another way
- 17% preferred a two-way text messaging system so that they respond back, while 73% thought texting back was not important or very unimportant

4 TEXT MESSAGE SYSTEM

Name	Edit	Delete
Auburn Public Health	Edit	Delete
Chinook Building (5th Ave)	Edit	Delete
Columbia Public Health	Edit	Delete
Distribution Center (S. Lucille St)	Edit	Delete
Downtown Public Health Center (4th Ave)	Edit	Delete
Eastgate Public Health	Edit	Delete
Federal Way Public Health	Edit	Delete
Harborview Medical Center	Edit	Delete
Kent Birch Creek	Edit	Delete
King County Correctional Facility (5th Ave)	Edit	Delete
Medic 1	Edit	Delete
North Public Health Center	Edit	Delete
North Seattle Dental Clinic (Lake City Way N.E.)	Edit	Delete
Northshore Public Health	Edit	Delete
Regional Justice Center Correctional Facility (Kent)	Edit	Delete
Renton Public Health	Edit	Delete
White Center Public Health	Edit	Delete
9th and Jefferson/MED & Vital Stats	Edit	Delete
Kent East Hill	Edit	Delete
Renton Dental Clinic	Edit	Delete
Navos Integrated Health Care	Edit	Delete

- Used vendor to develop online text messaging interface
- Employees signed up for text messages on their personal phones based on worksite location for greater customization
- Online system securely stored employee information
- Online system allowed administrators to send and track messages

