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## **The Express-Times**

# **Easton Suburban Water Authority will update phone database**

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By **EDWARD SIEGER**

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**PALMER TWP.** | Easton Suburban Water Authority will continue using the automated phone system it purchased about a year ago to notify customers of problems.

But the authority now realizes it needs to build its own database after the system failed to notify thousands of customers of a boil water advisory.

Staff discussed the system's first authority-wide use Monday with the board of directors.

The authority will ask customers in the January, February and March billings to supply primary and secondary phone numbers and an e-mail address that will be entered into a new database, said Erin Schulberger, its customer relations manager.

Contact information will be entered as it's received, and the authority hopes to conduct a test in four to five months, she said.

The authority issued the advisory Jan. 3 after cloudiness in the water briefly exceeded normal levels. Cloudy water isn't necessarily dangerous but has a greater chance than clear water of containing disease-causing organisms.

Schulberger said Easton Suburban has phone numbers for only 30 percent of its customers. Some customers may not have been assigned a telephone number yet when they started water service, while other long-term customers may have never been required to provide one, she said.

In the case of a large apartment complex, the authority may have the phone number only for the property owner, who receives the water bill, Schulberger said.

The automated phone system made about 39,000 phone calls in less than 15 minutes, according to Tim Ryan, the authority's information technology manager. The system called a phone number six times before registering an "unsuccessful" call, he said.

The authority serves about 31,500 customers, and the system successfully reached more than 34,000 people. What remains unclear is how many customers didn't receive phone calls and how many noncustomers did.

Ryan told directors that the phone numbers purchased by the authority that accompanied the phone system were culled from various databases. Some phone numbers were outdated, disconnected or belonged to people who do not live in the authority's area, he said.

The authority received more than 6,500 phone calls and more than 400 e-mails about the advisory over three days.

Authority Manager Roy White said employees hand-delivered 720 notices to critical customers, such as hospitals. He's planning a meeting with the Northampton County emergency task force about information sharing.

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