



MENDOCINO COUNTY S.A.F.E.

SERVICE AUTHORITY FOR FREEWAY EMERGENCIES

Phillip J. Dow, Executive Director
367 N. State Street, Suite 206
Ukiah, CA 95482

Phone 707-463-1806
Fax 707-463-2212

January 17, 2014

For Release: January 18, 2014

To: Mendocino County News Media

Contact: Phil Dow, Executive Director, Mendocino SAFE, 463-1859

Innovative Satellite Call Boxes Installed for Motorist Safety

During the week of January 6, the first system of motorist-aid call boxes in the nation using satellite communications were installed on State Routes 20 and 162 by Mendocino County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies, known as Mendocino SAFE. The contractor, CASE Systems, completed 13 new installations and 3 upgrades, on SR-162 (Covelo Road) and western segments of SR-20, covering remote areas lacking adequate cell phone coverage to provide emergency dispatch services.

Recognizing the problem of weak, unreliable or nonexistent cellular reception in many parts of the county, Mendocino SAFE purchased and began testing the first satellite call box in 2012 at a site near Yorkville on SR-128, in cooperation with CASE Systems, a company serving the statewide call box system. Standard call boxes are equipped with a high-power cellular antenna atop a 14-foot pole that can receive a signal where a hand-held mobile device cannot. Even so, this equipment has been found to be inadequate in some rural locations.

“With the purchase and testing of the very first satellite call box in 2012, Mendocino SAFE led the way in expanding coverage in areas not served by cellular signals,” stated Phil Dow, Executive Director. “We now find that other agencies in the state are following our lead in concentrating call boxes where they are likely to be most needed.”

Mendocino SAFE plans to infill satellite call boxes on state highways countywide, wherever service is poor or unreliable. The countywide system now includes over 80 active boxes. The California Highway Patrol responds to calls through its dispatch center.

Mendocino SAFE invites anyone who has had a call box experience to share their story of how it helped to rescue a stranded vehicle. Please email staff at pedrottia@dow-associates.com, call (707) 463-1806, or write to 367 N. State Street, Suite 206, Ukiah, CA 95482.

While some urban areas have been removing their call boxes, instead using funding for roving tow trucks and other traffic management services on state highways, rural agencies such as Mendocino SAFE still experience a demand for call box services on remote highways. The proliferation of cell phone usage is well known; however significant gaps in coverage are expected to remain in rural Mendocino County. Call box deployment may be most valuable in those areas.

Mendocino SAFE formed as a joint powers agreement in 1994. The agency is overseen by a board consisting of two county supervisors, a countywide public appointee, and one council member from each of the four incorporated cities. For more information, call the SAFE office at 463-1806 or consult the agency's web page at www.mendocinocog.org/safe.shtml.

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