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- [Carnation officials confront Seattle council over Tolt Dam | Snoqualmie Valley Record](#)
- [Seattle leaders to fix false alarm problems at Tolt Dam | Snoqualmie Valley Record](#)
- [‘The community is very traumatized’: Carnation residents air grievances over Tolt Dam false alarms – KIRO 7 News Seattle](#)
- [‘People were so traumatized’; Carnation city leaders demand action on Seattle’s Tolt Dam \(fox13seattle.com\)](https://www.fox13seattle.com)

- [New warning system installed on Tolt Dam | Snoqualmie Valley Record](#)
- [The City of Seattle Fails to Deliver Fully Operating Emergency Warning System for Carnation Residents - Living Snoqualmie](#)
- [Carnation leaders say dam breach system still problematic after city of Seattle's fix | KOMO \(komonews.com\)](#)
- [Carnation says its time for Seattle to pay up, calling new Tolt River Dam sirens a complete failure \(fox13seattle.com\)](#)
- [Carnation leaders criticize Tolt River Dam warning system | king5.com](#)
- [Carnation mayor slams Seattle's new's Tolt River Dam Warning system | king5.com](#)
- [City of Carnation urging for dam warning system to be fixed as false alarms cause mass panic – KIRO 7 News Seattle](#)
- [Carnation city leaders consider fines, federal intervention over faulty dam warning system | KOMO \(komonews.com\)](#)
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- [Carnation leaders demand action on Tolt Dam Warning System | Snoqualmie Valley Record](#)

False alarm: Panic ensues after Tolt Dam failure alert activated by mistake

Published July 28, 2020
Carnation
Q13 FOX

Tolt Dam failure alert activation was false alarm

A dam failure alert caused panic in Carnation, WA on Tuesday. But the alert was a 'false alarm' and officials said they are investigating.

CARNATION, Wash. - A Tolt Dam failure alert sent residents of Carnation into panic mode Tuesday as loud sirens filled the air and firetrucks rolled through area farms and told people to evacuate. Turns out, it was a false alarm.

Sgt. Ryan Abbott with the King County Sheriff's Office confirmed that the sirens sounded in error. Another official said the sirens went off for about 30 minutes before they were turned off.

A Q13 viewer called the news station and said fire trucks arrived at Remlinger Farms, with firefighters telling people to evacuate before learning it was a false alarm.

According to the Seattle Public Utilities website, the city of Seattle owns and operates the Tolt Reservoir and Dams, located 16 miles upstream from the City of Carnation on the South Fork Tolt River.

There are pre-recorded sirens that will play during a local emergency, the website says, including:

- **Test message: "This is a test of the Tolt Dam Warning System. This is only a test."**
- **Dam failure: The Tolt Dam has failed. Evacuate the area immediately."**
- **All clear: "It is safe to return. The dam is secure."**
- **Community emergency: "A community emergency has developed, please stay in your home until further advised."**

Carnation residents head to higher ground after Tolt River Dam false alarm

A worker accidentally set off the warning system for a dam failure. Before it was cleared up, many residents of Carnation started evacuation procedures.



Author: Glenn Farley

Published: 6:09 PM PDT July 28, 2020

Updated: 6:10 PM PDT July 28, 2020

CARNATION, Wash. — It turned out to be a false alarm, but for about an hour it was very real for residents of Carnation.

A siren system designed to warn of a breach in the earthen dam holding back the Tolt Reservoir, went off about 11:15 a.m., says interim Carnation City Manager Bob Jean.

He, like many residents, thought it was real at first. He tried to make calls to confirm it, while many residents headed along evacuation routes to higher ground.

Jean says Seattle Public Utilities, which operates the dam, called Carnation after a few minutes. But Jean says the alarm itself, accompanied by an automated electronic voice warning to evacuate, sounded for around an hour.

“And it was believable, and it was very real,” Jean said. “We started going through our notifications, and evacuation process.”

He says he’s told that a work crew was working on the siren system and accidentally triggered it.

The warning system is an important safety measure for the residents. If the dam breaks, there’s nowhere else for the water to go.

Mark Pesanti, who lives on the Tolt River east of town, took no chances.

“The siren was elongated, went on for like two minutes,” Pesanti said. “I opened the door to hear what they were saying, and it said, ‘The dam has failed, evacuate immediately.’ So, it didn’t take me too long to evacuate.”

But the siren itself is familiar to residents of Carnation. Both men say the alarm is tested every Wednesday at noon, along with a voice that says it’s only a test.

This time it sounded different, in both tone, duration and message.

Jean says there are lessons learned for the city, especially in the area of communications.

Jean found a bright side to the unexpected evacuation drill.

“But I was pleased to see, that most people in town took it seriously,” he said.

Tolt Dam failure alarm accidentally goes off

by KOMO Staff

Tue, July 28th 2020, 11:43 AM PDT





Tolt Reservoir Dam (KOMO Photo)



CARNATION, Wash. -- An alarm alerting of a failure in the Tolt River Dam accidentally went off Tuesday morning, but it was a false alarm.

The King County Sheriff's Office says crews were working on the system when it inadvertently went off.

"The dam is safe, please disregard the alarm," said sheriff's spokesperson Ryan Abbott.

False Alarm: Tolt River Dam failure siren accidentally activated Tuesday afternoon in Carnation

July 28, 2020 by [Danna McCall](#)

According to the King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO), the Tolt River Dam failure alarm system falsely activated around 11:15AM, Tuesday, July 28th.

The loud alert system and siren notifies residents of dam failures and instructs them to evacuate the area.

One resident said the alarm system went off for at least 10 minutes and caused many to begin leaving the area, creating a temporary traffic bottleneck.

She said once it was determined the alarm was false, fire trucks drove through the area alerting drivers of the false alarm using the trucks' PA systems.

Locals say the dam failure alarm is usually tested on Wednesdays.

KCSO Sgt. Ryan Abbott said technicians were working on the system when it was accidentally set off. He confirmed it is safe and residents could return to their homes and businesses.

The City of Seattle owns and operates the Tolt Reservoir and dams, which are located about 16 miles upstream from Carnation on the South Fork of the Tolt River.

According to the [City of Seattle website](#), the reservoir stores 57,900 acre-ft of water and supplies 30% of the drinking water for 1.3 million people in the Seattle area.



Tolt River reservoir and Morning Glory spillway. Photo: City of Seattle

Washington dam failure alert system activated by mistake, sends people 'running' for higher ground

The Tolt Reservoir and Dam are located 16 miles upstream from Carnation, Washington

By Travis Fedischun **Fox News**

Published July 29, 2020 8:56am EDT



[Video](#)

Residents and visitors in a city in [Washington state](#) were sent scrambling for [safety](#) on Tuesday after receiving a [warning](#) about a [dam failure](#) that thankfully turned out to be just a false alarm.

The incident happened around 11:15 a.m. local time when the failure alarm at the Tolt Dam, a 200-foot high earth-filled dam, began going off in the city of [Carnation](#), located about 30 miles east of [Seattle](#).

The Tolt Reservoir and Dam are located 16 miles upstream from Carnation along the South Fork Told River, and supply about 30 percent of the drinking water for 1.3 million people in the Seattle area, according to the Seattle Public Utilities (SPU).

Interim Carnation City Manager Bob Jean told [KING5](#) he thought the alarm was "believable" and "very real," while trying to get more information from SPU.

"We started going through our notifications, and evacuation process," he said.



Evacuation sirens were sounded by mistake on Tuesday, saying that the Tolt Dam at the Tolt River Reservoir had failed. (City of Seattle)

[According to the SPU website](#), pre-recorded sirens will play during a local emergency in the event of a dam failure when high water in Carnation "may exceed a depth of 13 feet within a short period of time."

"In the unlikely event of a dam failure, water from the reservoir may inundate the City of Carnation," the utility states. "To alert residents of such an event, the city works closely with the local government to maintain an advanced dam failure warning system."

If the dam were to fail, sirens will activate and the following message warning will go out to residents to evacuate the area: "The Tolt Dam has failed, evacuate the area immediately."

NATIONAL

False Tolt Dam Failure Alert Triggers Evacuation in Washington

By Rohan Unnikrishnan
07/30/20 AT 6:30 AM EDT

Panic mode switched on for residents of Carnation, Washington, on Tuesday, July 28, after a failure alert siren went off at the Tolt Dam, warning for immediate evacuation. Luckily, it was a false alarm.

"And it was believable, and it was very real," interim Carnation City Manager Bob Jean told [King5](#) news. "We started going through our notifications, and evacuation process."

The loud siren system designed to alert residents of an unlikely event of a failure in the 200-foot high earth-filled dam went off about 11:15 a.m on Tuesday.

According to the Seattle Public Utilities website, "the warning system is automated and monitored by operators in the SPU Operations Control Center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Sirens provide early flood warnings and are tested every Wednesday at noon. These tests involve activating the sirens and playing pre-recorded audio messages."

Sgt. Ryan Abbott with the King County Sheriff's Office told Q13 FOX that the alarms were set off accidentally while the technicians were conducting routine checks on the system.

"In the unlikely event of a dam failure, high water in the City limits may exceed a depth of 13 feet within a short period of time. Telephone lines will also be taxed, so contacting local governmental agencies is not recommended. Instead, Carnation residents should heed the siren warnings and follow the evacuation signs away from the inundation area," the utility website stated.

Residents say that they are familiar with the usual test siren and the message played every Wednesday announcing, "This is a test of the Tolt Dam Warning System. This is only a test."

But they say this time it sounded different. The sirens alarmed and produced an alert message that "the Tolt Dam has failed, evacuate the area immediately."

The loud siren and warning message for immediate evacuation created panic among the residents. Roads were blocked as residents scrambled for safety.

"The siren was elongated, went on for like two minutes," Mark Pesanti, a resident in the neighborhood told King5. "I opened the door to hear what they were saying, and it said, 'The dam has failed, evacuate immediately.' So, it didn't take me too long to evacuate."

Another resident told Q13 that fire trucks and firefighters were requesting residents to evacuate the area before they realized it was a false alarm.

"A truck came through saying ' there has been a breach in the Tolt Dam. Get out! Get out! Get out! Get out!" the woman said. "Then another woman came screaming at us and people that were in the river started running. So the word got out that the dam had collapsed."

Jean says the alarm followed by the automated electronic voice warning to evacuate, sounded for about an hour.

Finally, a "clear message" saying "It is safe to return, the dam is secure," was sent once the officials deemed the area is safe for residents to return to their homes.

Fire trucks drove through the area alerting drivers of the false alarm.

The King County Sheriff's Office also sent an alert to the public by tweeting it was a "false alarm."

However, speaking to King5, Jean said that he found a bright side to the unexpected evacuation drill. "I was pleased to see that most people in town took it seriously," he said.

"The reservoir stores 57,900 acre-ft of water to supply 30% of the drinking water for 1.3 million people in the metropolitan Seattle area," the utility website stated.

Carnation revisits evacuation plan after false alarm at Tolt River Dam

by Joel Moreno, KOMO News Reporter

Mon, August 3rd 2020, 10:46 PM PDT



(Photo: KOMO News)



CARNATION, Wash. — A false alarm is shaking up city leaders in Carnation.

Last week, sirens sounded that floodwaters were about to sweep through the city. If it had been real the loss of life could have been catastrophic.

Out of the panic has emerged a new push for a better emergency response plan.

The Tolt River Dam is 14 miles upriver from Carnation and a system of sirens is in place to warn people if it ever breaches. Those alarms accidentally tripped on July 28.

"For me it was an instant oh my gosh. What do I grab? How much time do I have. Can I get out in time? Where can I go," said Sheila Anderson, one of many Carnation residents who went into a panic.

In the event of a major dam breach, some models estimate water up to 30 feet deep could inundate parts of Carnation. People weren't going to wait around to find out.

"There was already traffic backed up heading that direction," said Jennie Pasquarella, pointing down one of the main routes out of town. "Being an outsider I didn't really know which direction I should go."

City leaders invited Seattle Public Utilities, which operates the dam, to a virtual meeting to explain to the public what went wrong and how it's being fixed.

"The message I want you to hear is how deeply sorry we are for the confusion and fear that we caused last Tuesday. We own that responsibility and we must be better," said Alex Chen with SPU.

The problem stemmed from a faulty control panel which then activated the sirens. However, people who live in Carnation were more concerned about the lack of communication and all the distress that it caused.

Jerry Murphy wants more information to be shared about the risks and where to seek safety.

“Build a map that says these are the stages of a Tolt River (Dam) failure,” Murphy said. “This is your critical zone, and it just keeps going to a less zone, less zone until finally you start getting to the safe zones.”

Such maps exist but generally aren't made public for security reasons. However, all aspects of Carnation's emergency flood response are now under review.

“If it had actually been a failure, we would have all perished and that's what's so scary to me about this,” Pasquarella said.

City leaders are aiming for August 18 to have a strategy identified though it could take longer. Meanwhile, SPU will be making emergency system upgrades in the coming months.

Call for upgrades after Tolt River Dam warning system fails to go off during tests

King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert is demanding Mayor Jenny Durkan and Seattle Public Utilities invest in upgrades for the Tolt River Dam warning system.



Author: KING 5 Staff

Published: 6:45 PM PST January 14, 2021

Updated: 6:45 PM PST January 14, 2021

CARNATION, Wash. — The Tolt River Dam warning system, designed to warn of a breach in the earthen dam holding back the Tolt reservoir, has not sounded three times during tests in the past several months.

Now, King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert is calling on Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and Seattle Public Utilities to make investments to upgrade and improve the dam warning system and evacuation routes.

The dam, which is 16 miles upstream from Carnation, is owned and operated by the City of Seattle. If the dam fails, it could be devastating for the residents of Carnation.

The warning system is the life line for residents there. It would give them the valuable few minutes they would need to evacuate before the town would be flooded with 30 feet of water.

In July 2020, the warning system sent out a [false alarm](#), terrifying the residents of Carnation and causing them to evacuate to higher ground.

Lambert said in a statement to KING 5 that the siren warning system failures are eroding the public's trust.

"Over 1,500 residents of Carnation and the surrounding unincorporated areas rely on the warning system to provide accurate and timely alerts in the event of a dam failure," said Lambert in a statement. "This pattern of failures further erodes the public's trust and confidence that City of Seattle is ready, willing, and able to respond to a real disaster."

Seattle Public Utilities said there isn't a problem and in a statement to KING 5 said, "While the alarm did not sound yesterday during the weekly test, dam safety monitoring was never interrupted."

KING 5

Tolt Dam alarm fails again

By [Graham Johnson, KIRO 7 News](#) January 14, 2021 at 9:01 pm PST



VIDEO: Tolt River Dam warning system fails during scheduled test

You can set your watch to it.

Every Wednesday at noon, people in Carnation hear a piercing siren followed by a recorded message announcing a test of the Tolt Dam warning system.

“At school, we would do evacuation drills,” said Zeb Panek, who grew up in Carnation.

The Tolt Dam is 16 miles upriver.

If it fails, people must get out quickly, as the town could be under 30 feet of water in 90 minutes.

On Wednesday, as well as back on Sept. 9, the weekly test didn’t go off at all.

On July 28, 2020, a Tuesday, a false alarm sounded and created major panic.

“We just saw all the cars leaving town. Everybody was out,” said Ali Davis, who lives nearby.

“People in town are still dealing with PTSD from this event,” said King County Councilwoman Kathy Lambert, who represents the area.

Now, after three alarm failures, Lambert has had more than enough and, on Thursday, issued a blistering statement against Seattle Public Utilities, the owner of the dam.

“It truly can be life and death, and it’s not being taken seriously,” Lambert said in an interview.

The reservoir behind Tolt Dam supplies 30% of the Seattle area’s drinking water.

On Thursday, a Chopper 7 video showed the dam was full after all the rain.

“While they have been very good about apologizing, they have not been very good about following through with the things we need to have done,” Lambert said.

KIRO 7 asked Seattle Public Utilities for an interview.

Instead, officials sent a statement, saying power outages brought down the fiber optic network that delivers the audio warnings.

They said the backup microwave system worked for safety monitoring of the dam, but not for the audio messages and that engineers are working on a fix.

The utility stated if there was an emergency, King County Emergency Management and the 911 center could send messages through Reverse 911 calls and text messages.

The utility stated after the false alarm last summer, it replaced a control panel.

It is also prioritizing an upgrade to the alarm system to be implemented in 2022.

Tolt Dam fails another weekly test following windstorm

Seattle Public Utilities will be presenting to the Carnation City Council on Jan. 19.

By [Record Staff](#)

January 15, 2021 1:30 pm



Tolt Reservoir and Morning Glory Spillway. From [Seattle.gov](#)

The Tolt River Dam warning system failed to activate during a regular weekly test for the third time in the last several months, concerning King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert.

In a statement, Lambert called it part of a “pattern of failures” that erodes the public’s trust and confidence in the dam, which is owned by the City of Seattle. The dam’s reservoir provides water to 1.5 million residents in the area.

If the dam were to fail, the city of Carnation could be flooded with more than 30 feet of fast-moving water in a matter of minutes. In addition to the instances of the alarm failing to activate during tests, last July, the system sent out a false alarm, which led to unnecessary evacuations.

“Since that time, the warning system has failed to activate during its routine weekly test on two separate occasions,” Lambert said in a statement. “Over 1,500 residents of Carnation and the surrounding unincorporated areas rely on

the warning system to provide accurate and timely alerts in the event of a dam failure.”

In a statement, Seattle Public Utilities, which maintains the dam, said the utility experienced an audio issue on Jan. 13 with its weekly alarm test following the severe windstorm that moved through Puget Sound earlier this week. It resulted in scattered power outages across the region.

“While the alarm did not sound on Wednesday (Jan. 13) during the weekly test, dam safety monitoring was never interrupted. (Seattle Public Utilities) continues to monitor the dam 24/7 using various technology, including cameras and sensors installed along the Tolt Dam,” the statement reads.

Shortly before the test on Jan. 13, staff conducted a weekly internal test and detected a potential issue related to the audio part of the alert test. Partner agencies were notified, including the city of Carnation.

If there were an emergency, the statement reads, an emergency action plan would be activated that includes King County, Carnation and NORCOM to “communicate timely information to the public.”

The statement also addressed the July 28 false alarm, and states that the utility investigated the issue and replaced a control panel. Staff also met with Carnation officials to discuss the incident and plan short-term repairs and long-term upgrades.

“(Seattle Public Utilities) is prioritizing a system upgrade to the Tolt Dam warning system. Staff have begun designing the system upgrade and are expediting implementation for 2022,” the statement reads.

Seattle Public Utilities staff will also be making a presentation at the Carnation City Council meeting on Jan. 19.

What comes next for the Tolt Dam warning system?

The alarm has malfunctioned several times over the last year, concerning residents.

By [Aaron Kunkler](#)

January 28, 2021 1:30 am



Tolt River flood waters inundated Carnation Feb. 6-7, 2020. File photo

After the Tolt River Dam warning system failed a regular test for a third time in the last several months, the utility that owns the dam is exploring ways to upgrade its alerts.

The dam, located in northeast King County, is owned by Seattle Public Utilities. It provides water to some 1.5 million people in the region. But the city of Carnation lies downstream. If the dam were to break, residents would have to evacuate before a 30-foot wall of water descended on them.

A current alarm siren system exists, and is scheduled to run test alerts every Wednesday at noon. On Jan. 13, the alarm failed to sound after a severe

windstorm ripped through Puget Sound. While the dam was not in danger of breaking, and Seattle Public Utilities informed the city that the alarm may not sound, residents were concerned about it. The alarm also failed to sound in September.

In July, a false alarm sent Carnation residents scrambling to reach higher ground.

Carnation Mayor Kim Lisk said the false alarm in July left residents on high alert. And with so many people working from home due to the coronavirus pandemic, she would like to see a rethinking of how Seattle Public Utilities communicates with her constituents. Others with hearing disabilities may not know sirens are going off.

“Our main concern is communication,” Lisk said. “How are you communicating with our community? Why are we not getting an alert on our phones just like we do when there’s flooding or power outages?”

King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert, who represents Carnation and eastern King County, said she was in lockstep with the rural city. She said Seattle Public Utilities did a good job apologizing for the mistakes and technical glitches, but she wants to see a full list of what the utility company is planning on doing to address the problems.

“I want to see now action to go with those apologies,” Lambert said.

Lisk and others voiced these concerns at a Carnation City Council meeting last week, attended by Seattle Public Utilities representatives, including Alex Chen, the utility’s water division director.

If the dam were to fail, Chen said an emergency alert would be relayed to their partners at the King County Office of Emergency Management, NORCOM and Snohomish County. These agencies have emergency communication tools like a reverse 911 call, or an Amber Alert style text message to quickly get the word out.

“The emergency action plan for the dam has several components, of which the sirens are one part,” Chen said.

But after the meeting with Carnation leaders, Chen said it was clear that the current alert system can make it difficult for residents to discern what is an emergency and what isn’t. Seattle Public Utilities representative are meeting

with King County emergency staff and Carnation leaders on Jan. 29 to discuss ways to improve the system.

One possibility is a system run by the county, called Alert King County. Residents could sign up for alerts that would be delivered either by email or text message.

Any changes to the alert system will be in addition to the sirens. But those sirens are also getting an upgrade.

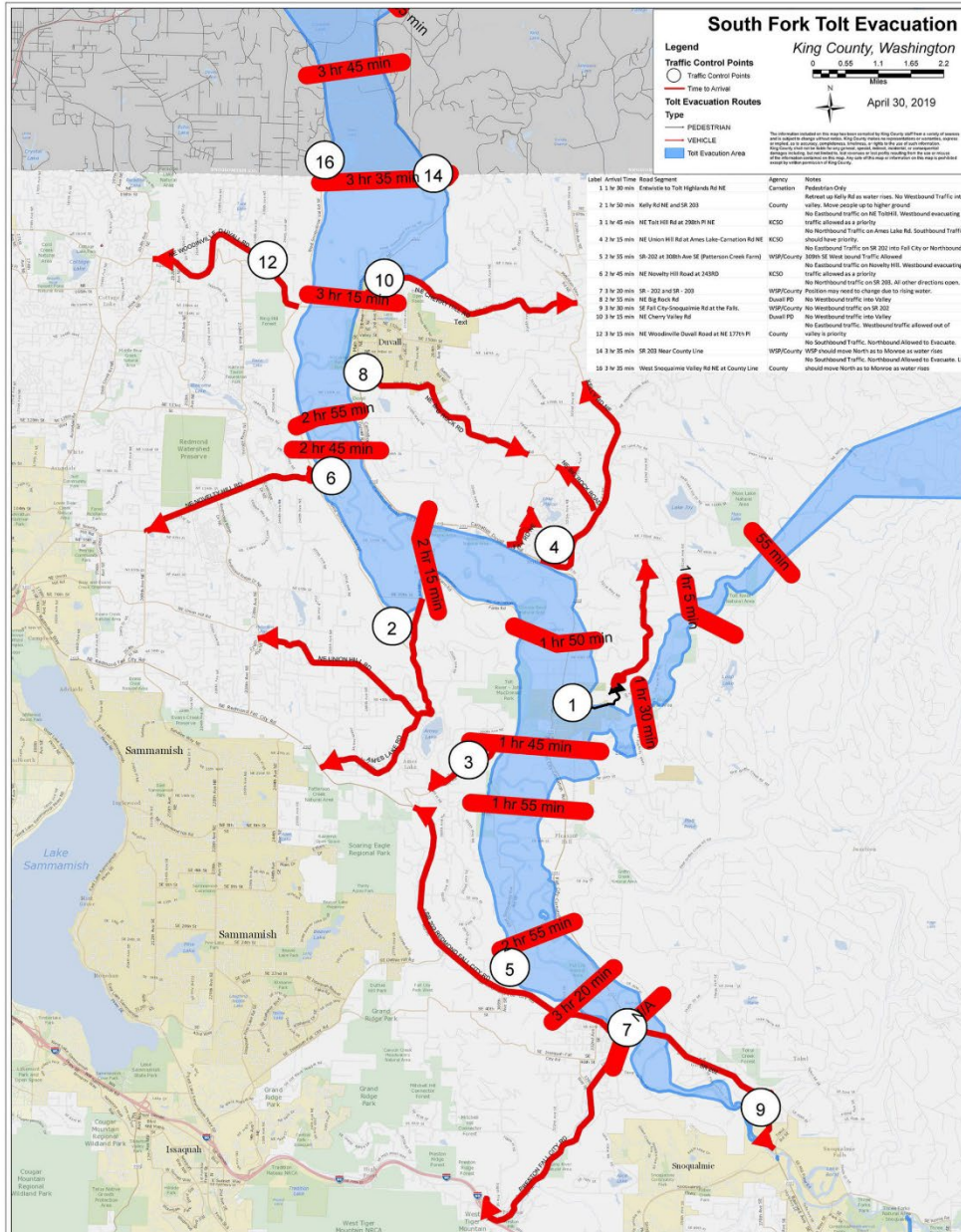
Seattle Public Utilities are designing upgrades to the siren system. This includes ordering replacement sirens, starting design work and getting the necessary permits. They hope to get the needed federal permits by the end of this year, and the sirens should be installed in the first half of 2022.

Throughout this year, the utility will be hosting public meetings with Carnation residents. The first will be scheduled for the end of February, although a date hasn't been announced.

If the Tolt River Dam breaks, these places are at risk of flooding

The Record obtained a copy of a 2019 inundation map through a public records request.

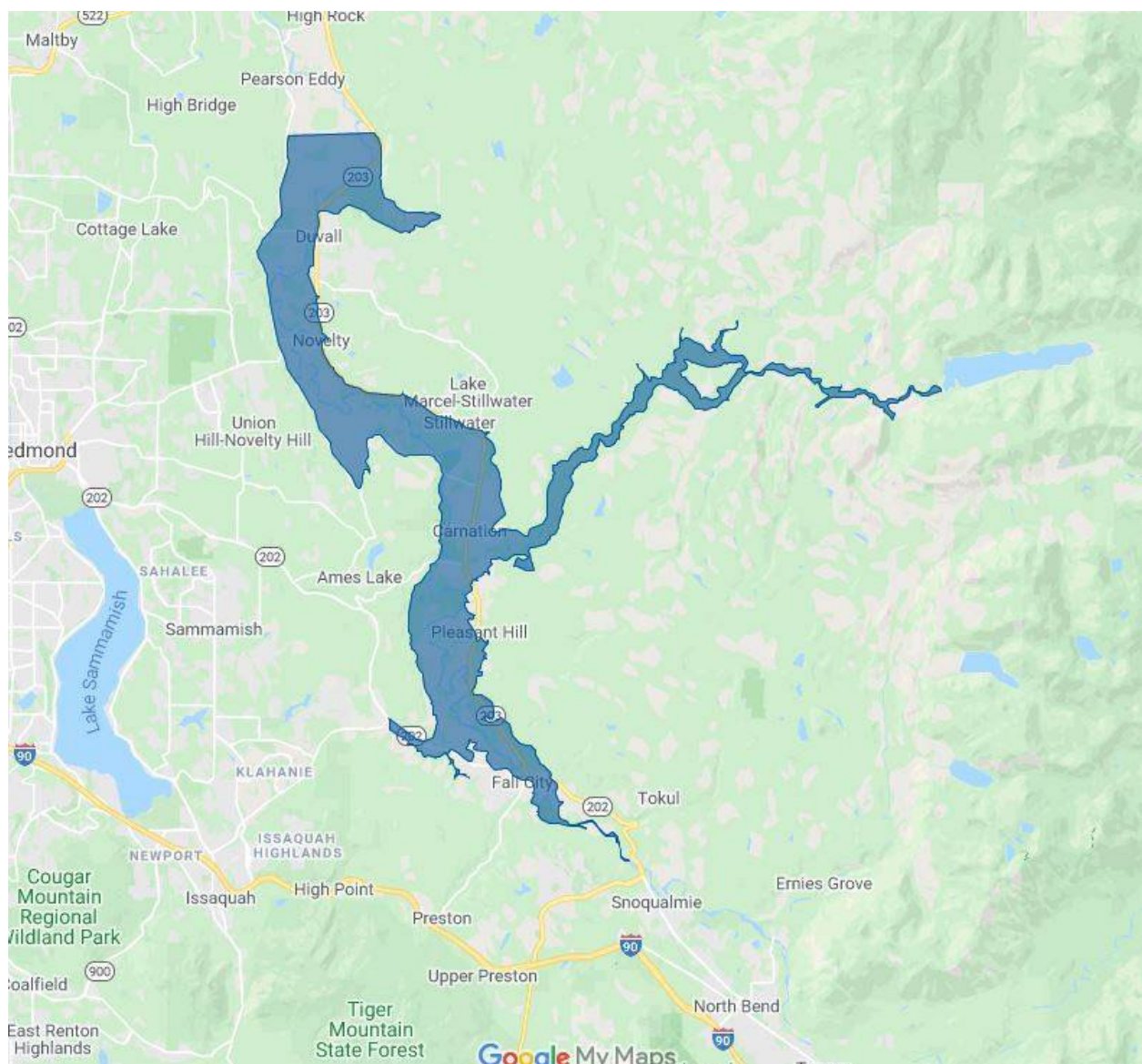
By [Aaron Kunkler](#) • May 18, 2021 5:00 pm



An inundation map outlining areas of King County which are likely to flood if the Tolt River Dam fails. This map was obtained through a records request made by the Snoqualmie Valley Record to Seattle Public Utilities.

Ever since a false dam failure alarm sent Carnation residents scrambling for higher ground last July, city officials and residents have been asking Seattle Public Utilities for inundation maps.

These maps show areas where water from the Tolt River dam would flood if the dam were to fail. This week, the King County Office of Emergency Management released a [Google map](#) showing a rough outline of areas that would be flooded, stretching from King County's northern border down through Fall City. The dam itself is owned and operated by Seattle Public Utilities, and the utility company works with the county to create and implement emergency response plans.



A screenshot of the inundation map released by King County that shows areas of the county which could be flooded if the Tolt River Dam failed.

Through a records request filed with Seattle Public Utilities, this newspaper obtained two, more detailed maps, one of which is dated from April 2019, and can be seen at the top of this story. It shows when flood waters are expected to reach various communities throughout the Snoqualmie Valley.

The map shows that flood waters would reach Carnation within an hour and a half, and spread south to Fall city in three hours and 20 minutes. To the north, it would reach Duvall within three hours, and continue further into Snohomish County. The second map, also discovered in the records request, shows inundation stretching deep into Snohomish County.

Alex Chen, Seattle Public Utilities interim branch deputy director for drinking water, said they weren't planning on releasing the map which shows estimated flood water arrival times. Chen said they're concerned that such maps could give a false sense of security to residents, who if the dam failed, may believe they have a set amount of time left before they should evacuate.

Chen stressed that the maps, and flood times, were only estimates using a number of assumptions about what a worst-case scenario may look like, and could vary significantly depending on a variety of factors.

"We don't want people to be relying on these estimated times to guide their response," he said.

Instead, both Seattle Public Utilities and King County's emergency management hope people who receive alerts in the event of a dam failure will evacuate immediately.

Chad Buechler, emergency management program leader with Seattle Public Utilities, said the message he wanted to convey was in the event of an emergency, grab loved ones, pets and a go-bag, and get out immediately.

Carnation officials and Seattle Public Utilities said there are no concerns over the safety of the dam itself. The dam is monitored around the clock and receives daily inspections, and remains in compliance with federal regulations.

For the Google map released by King County, a description states that the city of Seattle "cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this map. Each user of this map is responsible for determining its suitability for their intended use or purpose."

“In the event of an actual failure, the affected areas will depend on specific failure conditions and will likely differ from mapping shown,” the statement continues.

The county released the Google map after Carnation officials and residents consistently requested them, said Carnation Mayor Kim Lisk.

“That was one of our big pushes,” Lisk said.

The records request filed by this newspaper shows that since at least July 2020, residents were asking for more information on inundation. One person requested “simple info that would let the residents know the danger zones.”

In response, a civil engineer with Seattle Public Utilities wrote that the inundation route had been modeled as part of the Tolt Emergency Action Plan, but that these maps “contain references to critical infrastructure and are not typically released to the public.”

But during an actual dam failure, people in the inundation zone need to know whether they’re at risk, and where to evacuate to, Lisk said.

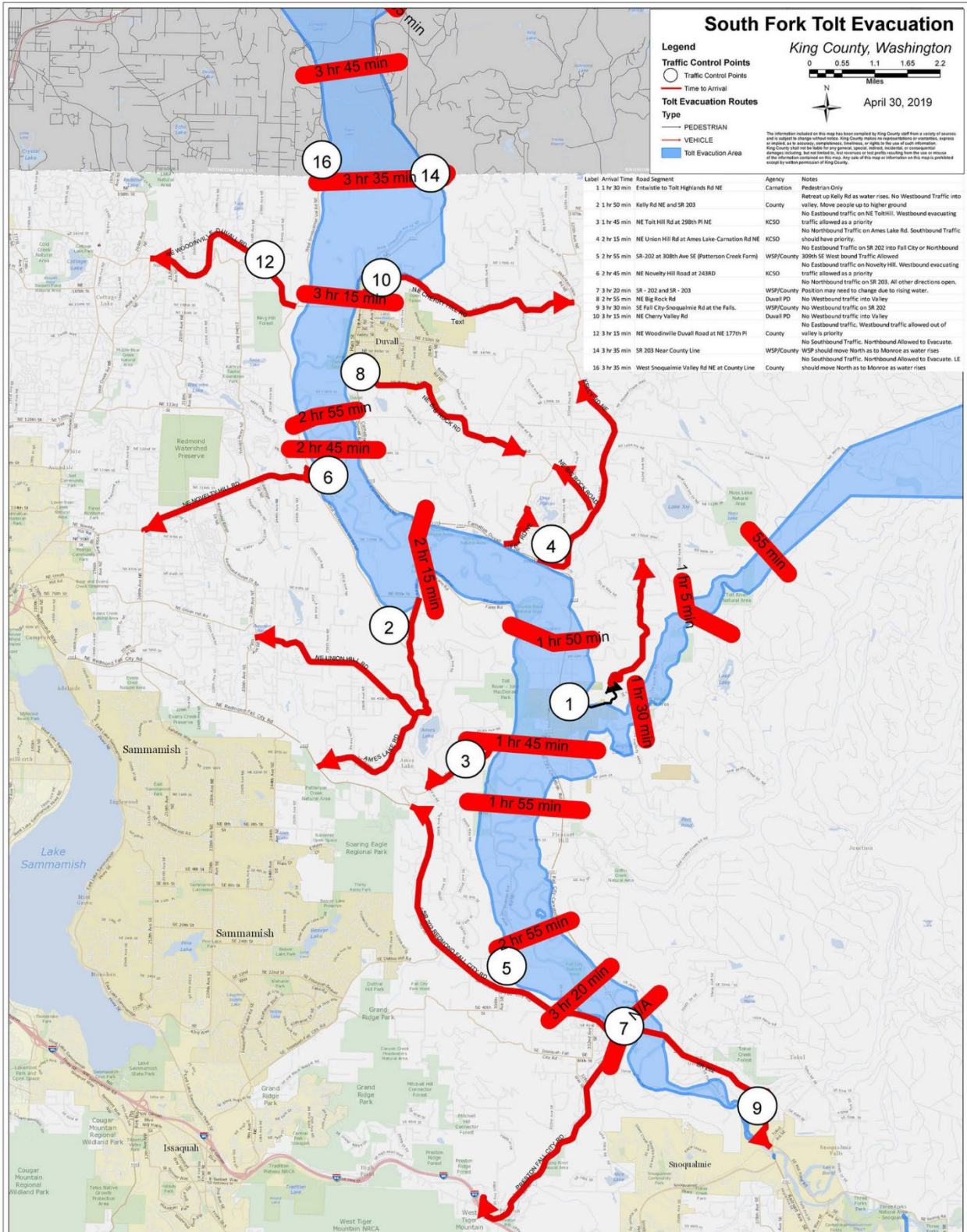
For people outside of the inundation zone, the best thing to do is to stay put and not add to traffic, Lisk said. But without detailed maps, it can be difficult for people to know whether they should stay or go.

“To me, it’s like the more information, the better prepared you can be in an emergency,” Lisk said.

Since July, Lisk said Seattle Public Utilities has been working more closely with the city and community, following the false alarm. Seattle Public Utilities stated in [previous coverage](#) that they are designing upgrades to the siren system.

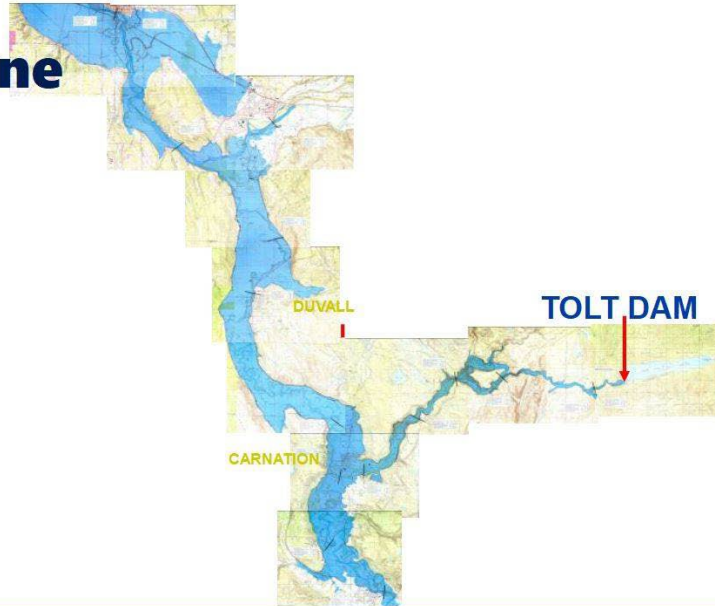
This includes ordering replacement sirens, starting design work and getting the necessary permits. They hope to get the needed federal permits by the end of this year, and the sirens should be installed in the first half of 2022.

The alarm system failed to activate during regular weekly tests last year, and sent out a false alarm last July.



A inundation map outlining areas of King County which are likely to flood if the Tolt River Dam fails. This map was obtained through a records request made by the Snoqualmie Valley Record to Seattle Public Utilities.

Inundation Zone



Another map showing areas which could be flooded if the Tolt River Dam were to fail, it shows inundation from Fall City to the south, up through Snohomish County. This map was obtained through a records request made by the Snoqualmie Valley Record to Seattle Public Utilities.

SPU, Carnation investigating false alert from Tolt Dam warning system

A siren connected to the Tolt River Dam Early Warning System mistakenly went off on June 19

By [Conor Wilson](#) • June 22, 2023 11:38 am



Tolt Dam Reservoir. Photo courtesy of Seattle Public Utilities.

Officials with Seattle Public Utilities are investigating what caused a siren linked to the Tolt Dam emergency warning system to mistakenly trigger earlier this week.

On two separate occasions Monday (June 19), sirens connected to the Tolt River Dam Early Warning System went off and broadcast an evacuation message, the City of Carnation said in a statement Tuesday. The system is suppose to alert residents of failure on the Tolt Dam.

Around 10:18 a.m. Monday, a siren near town and a siren near the Tolt River's edge went off for about ten minutes, said Alex Chen, a director with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU). The siren near rivers edge then went off a second time at 5:25 p.m, he said.

Chen told the Carnation City Council Tuesday they are unsure what caused the siren to go off, but are investigating the incident and expect to have a report to the city soon. The dam remains safe, he said.

“We don’t have an answer other than we take it very seriously,” he said. “We know the proper functioning of that system is critical to the public’s trust.”

The dam and its reservoir are owned by the city of Seattle and provide drinking water to over 1.5 million Seattle-area residents. Carnation sits just 16 miles downstream. If the dam were to fail – which SPU stresses is unlikely – it could flood the city.

SPU monitors the dam 24/7 and its automated alert system is designed to notify residents in the event of a failure. The alarms are tested by SPU each Wednesday.

In a phone interview, Carnation City Manager Ana Cortez said the city will release more information to the public once SPU concludes its investigation.

“We are confident given the caliber of the individuals at SPU that we’ll get to the bottom of this,” she said. “The good news is the dam is fine.”

The alert Monday lasted only a few minutes, and compared to a similar erroneous alert that happened in July 2020, was much tamer, Cortez said. In 2020, the dam’s warning system went off for 40 minutes, prompting residents to evacuate.

SPU is in the process of overhauling the current alert system, Chen said. Crews are working to phase in a new system that they say will improve reliability. The old system is aging and difficult to maintain, according to SPU.

Each Wednesday, SPU has been testing both the new and old system, ensuring they are functioning as it attempts to fully transition to the new system, Chen said.

“You hear two sets of alarms every Wednesday,” Chen said, adding they plan to do more diagnostics during their regular Wednesday test this week. “Once we have all those diagnostics in hand we will be sending out the analysis.”

Carnation residents call for Seattle Public Utilities accountability after false evacuation alarms

By **KIRO 7 News Staff**

August 25, 2023 at 6:16 pm PDT



VIDEO: Carnation residents call for Seattle Public Utilities accountability after false alarms

CARNATION, Wash. — Carnation locals are calling for Seattle Public Utilities to be held accountable following an accidental evacuation alarm.

Cousins Tiffany Goodman and Candice Hozjan were raised in Carnation. The two tell KIRO 7's Lauren Donovan growing up in town you practice drills in case the Tolt River Dam breaks. A collapse of the dam could send a catastrophic wave of water into the Snoqualmie Valley.

“You’re under 30 feet of water, you’ve got logs, all the debris coming down the river,” said Hozjan. “It’s going to wipe out the whole city of Carnation.”

“The system’s flawed,” said Goodman. “What happens when the procedures and the safety nets are failing.”

Hozjan is worried, people in town are no longer taking the siren and subsequent alerts seriously.

“We sit at home now and we wait to see if it’s real or not and eventually that’s going to catch up,” said Hozjan.

Seattle Public Utilities responded to the recent false alarm in a statement emailed to KIRO 7:

“SPU sincerely apologizes for any confusion or concern this might have caused the residents of Carnation who heard the alarm sound. Please know that Seattle Public Utilities takes incidents like this seriously, and we are reviewing our protocols with the goal of meeting community expectations. It is our top priority to decommission the old system and commission Carnation’s new state-of-the-art Tolt Dam Warning system as soon as possible.”

The city of Carnation plans to hold a special meeting on Aug 30. to pass a state of emergency proclamation.

“Council will also discuss invite for Seattle Mayor and City Council to join Carnation, FERC, Congressional, senate and state reps for a community forum,” said Carnation City Manager, Ana Cortez.

‘Take this seriously’: Carnation declares state of emergency over latest Tolt Dam false alarm

Lauren Donovan, KIRO 7 News Staff

Thu, August 31, 2023 at 3:54 PM PDT · 2 min read



The City of Carnation City Council voted unanimously to declare a state of emergency Wednesday evening after the most recent Tolt River Dam false evacuation alarm.

The city council says that it is concerned for the safety of its residents as no all-clear signal was given after the incident. People living in the city have already asked that Seattle Public Utilities be held accountable after [the first false alarm](#). Deputy Mayor Tim Harris blames the false alarms on the dam's old and failing early alert system.

“This is a serious situation and it has been happening way too often. The amount of time that it has taken to get the new emergency siren system online has allowed the old system to degrade to the point where now the old system is failing and is causing these types of issues that we are dealing with false alarms in the city of Carnation,” said Harris.

The city council’s biggest fear is that Carnation residents will no longer take the warning system seriously if the false alarms continue.

Carnation Mayor Jim Raibail believes this proclamation will put some political pressure on the city of Seattle. From Raibail’s perspective, the utility provider should have fixed the problem after the first false alarm back in 2020.

For this latest false alarm, Raibail says it brought back unpleasant memories of the last time this happened.

“It was a very traumatic event for everybody in the City of Carnation,” he said.

“We really need SPU to take this seriously,” Raibail added. “I truly believe that if this happened in the city of Seattle, this would not take three years to get fixed.”

Seattle Public Utilities apologized for the incident last week. The agency declined an on-camera interview but emailed this statement:

“Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is currently in active discussions with Carnation officials and our emergency partners on how best to meet community expectations,” said SPU. “Based on feedback from residents on the new Warning System, we are making minor adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, by October.”

KIRO 7 has also learned that the Seattle mayor’s office plans to sit down with three Carnation city council members as well as Carnation’s own mayor to sort this out.

Carnation declares State of Emergency over Tolt Dam Warning System

After repeated false alarms, city officials say they no longer trust the emergency alert system

By [Conor Wilson](#) • August 31, 2023 2:07 pm



Tolt River flood waters cover Carnation on Feb. 6-7, 2020. File photo

Carnation officials have issued a state of emergency in the city over the repeated failures of the Tolt River Dam Warning System.

The 200-foot Tolt River Dam, owned by the city of Seattle, sits just 16 miles upstream of Carnation. If the dam fails – which officials stress is unlikely – a warning system is supposed to trigger, alerting residents to seek high ground and evacuate before the city is inundated.

Over the last three years, the warning system has mistakenly triggered multiple times, including two false alarms in recent months. In June, a dam

failure text message was mistakenly sent out, the city said. In August, a siren went off and some residents began evacuation protocols.

City councilmembers, who approved the emergency declaration in a unanimous vote Wednesday, say they no longer trust the reliability of the dam's communication system to alert them of potential flooding. They also criticized Seattle leaders for failing to address the frequent failures over the past few years.

Attention to the warning system has been heightened since a major false alarm in 2020, when an alert siren attached to the warning system rang for 40 minutes. A chaotic evacuation ensued as residents assumed the failure was real.

The city has suffered PTSD and been living in fear ever since, City Mayor Jim Ribail said this week. They are tired of waiting for a solution, he said, calling the lack of action unacceptable.

"I truly believe if this was happening in downtown Seattle this would not be going on for three years. It would of gotten fixed immediately." Ribail said. "We don't have the power to do anything out there on the Tolt Dam. We have 100% of the risk and 0% benefit."

Residents who spoke during public comment Wednesday shared similar concerns, saying they were frustrated by the repeated false alarms and emotional distress they caused. Resident Tara Voelker said the warning system has started to lose its meaning due to its repeated failures.

"We're at the point where people's reaction to the alarm is not to do the thing we've all been trained to do [and evacuate]," she said.

Carnation Deputy Mayor Tim Harris called the emergency declaration a necessary step, saying the failure of the warning system had become too frequent. The city is paying the price for Seattle's infrastructure, he said.

"It makes it clear it's a situation that the city of Seattle has to take seriously" he said. "There are families and businesses that live out here."

While it is unclear exactly what regulatory hurdles the declaration would remove, it does give City Manager Ana Cortez an additional \$100,000 of spending authority to pursue services related to a solution, according to the declaration.

Carnation has also sent a letter to Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell. They are requesting his presence, alongside other Washington and Tribal leaders, at a community forum tentatively scheduled for Sept. 30.

“The Carnation community is traumatized from these events,” the letter says. “The civic leadership of the city has organized a community forum to outline desired changes to [Carnation’s] relationship with the City of Seattle related to the Tolt Dam.”

Jamie Housen, a spokesperson for Harrell, wrote in an email they had received the Carnation request, but did not say if the mayor would attend. Housen redirected further communication to a Seattle Public Utilities spokesperson.

SPU is in the process of overhauling the current alert system on the dam, SPU Director Alex Chen told the city council earlier this year. Crews are working to phase in a new system that they say will improve reliability. The old system is aging and difficult to maintain, Chen said.

Each Wednesday, SPU has been testing both the new and old system, ensuring they are functioning as it attempts to fully transition to a new system.

During the latest false alarm in August, Sabrina Register, a spokesperson for SPU, said staff were performing minor work on the “soon to be decommissioned” warning system and accidentally set off an alarm. She said they immediately determined the dam was safe, noting it is monitored 24/7, and alerted partner organizations.

Register said they take recent recent incidents seriously and apologize for the confusion the false alarms may have caused.

“It is our top priority to decommission the old system and commission Carnation’s new state-of-the-art Tolt Dam Warning System as soon as possible,” she wrote in an email. “Based on feedback from residents on the new warning System, we are making minor adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, by October.”

Small town near Seattle declares state of emergency over false alarms from dam warning system

By [Paradise Afshar](#) and [Emma Tucker](#), CNN

Published 9:08 PM EDT, Fri September 1, 2023



A pedestrian evacuation sign points the way to an escape in case of a failure of the Tolt Dam in Carnation, Washington.
Ian Dewar/Alamy

A state of emergency was declared in a small city in Washington state this week after a warning system for a dam protecting the city from being flooded by a reservoir falsely went off a fourth time since 2020, city officials said.

The [alarm system in Carnation](#), about 30 miles east of Seattle near the confluence of the Snoqualmie and Tolt rivers, is intended to alert residents to evacuate if the Tolt Dam fails.

The false alarms have sent the city of 2,300 residents in a panic and has raised “concerns and doubts about the City of Seattle’s ability to operate the Tolt Dam,” the city of Carnation said in a news release.

Ad Feedback

While Seattle Public Utilities [is currently working](#) to replace its system with new technology and equipment, according to the Carnation website, false alarms remain an issue, with the latest system failure reported on August 22, prompting a state of emergency to be issued Wednesday.

“This council has been working really hard since 2020 to try to get a resolution to this situation,” Carnation Mayor Jim Ribail told CNN. “At this point, everybody on the city council and city staff is completely fed up with this.”

Ribail said the issue needs to be “fast-tracked.”

In a statement, Seattle Public Utilities told CNN they are “currently in active discussions with Carnation officials and our emergency partners on how best to meet community expectations following a false alarm of the Tolt Dam Early Warning System that sounded in and around the City on August 22.”

“SPU takes incidents like this seriously and sincerely apologizes for any confusion or concern the false alarm may have caused residents,” the statement said.

As part of the protocol, Carnation residents have been told to quickly reach higher ground to avoid being inundated with water. They can either use a dirt or paved path to reach a designated safe location.

The city runs frequent drills to prepare residents for a potential dam failure and a siren test goes off every Wednesday at noon, along with prerecorded messages.

“There’s a warning system in case the dam breaches to tell the town to evacuate,” Ribail told CNN.

City suffers ‘PTSD’ from false alarms, mayor says

The first time the alarm was falsely triggered, some residents suffered injuries while attempting to evacuate, he added. Some of the city’s elderly residents even knelt to brace themselves for a wall of water to hit them.

On July 28, 2020, the city's sirens falsely went off and it sent the town "into a panic," the mayor added. "It was a complete nightmare."

Ribail said the incident prompted Seattle Public Utilities to commission a new system.

"Since that time, we have had four false alarms that have happened since 2020," the mayor said. "The response has always been 'we're sorry, we're sorry, we're working on it.'"

"We have a city that's basically suffering from PTSD that is scared to death that something has happened," he continued.

"It's been a pretty traumatic experience for the citizens of Carnations for the last three years because we've had three more false alarms since then."

Ribail said the city had made attempts to remedy the situation with officials in Seattle, which owns and operates the Tolt Reservoir and Dams according to the city's website. The reservoir stores about 30% of the drinking water for the Seattle metro area.

Seattle Public Utilities said they are "reviewing and enhancing current protocols to include communications" such as text notifications to residents to inform them of a potential false alarm, along with having an announcement broadcast over siren speakers letting residents know "the dam is safe."

"It is our top priority to decommission the old system and commission Carnation's new state-of-the-art Tolt Dam Warning system as soon as possible," the public utility agency said in a statement. "Based on feedback from residents on the new Warning System, we are making minor adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, by October."

Ribail and Deputy Mayor Tim Harris said one of their concerns is false alarms will leave residents reluctant to take them seriously in the event of an emergency.

"It's becoming a cry wolf situation, unfortunately," Ribail said.

Carnation's tourist season is about to start, which tends to draw in crowds looking to enjoy everything from pumpkin patches and Christmas trees in the community. Some days the city's population can double with the influx of visitors.

"Another big issue there is people who are visiting from out of town, they have no idea what that siren is," Harris said. "They would be relying on Carnation citizens to tell them what to do, and if Carnation citizens don't believe it, why would they?"

Carnation City Council Declares State of Emergency Over Doubts Regarding Seattle's Operation of Tolt Dam

September 1, 2023 by [Melissa Grant](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

In a unanimous decision, the City Council of Carnation declared a State of Emergency last night due to lingering concerns over the City of Seattle's ability to safely operate the Tolt Dam.

The dam is located 16 miles upstream from Carnation on the South Fork Tolt River and is a critical water reservoir for the metropolitan Seattle area.

Background

Owned and operated by the City of Seattle, the Tolt Reservoir and Dam supply 30% of drinking water to 1.5 million residents in the metropolitan Seattle region. The reservoir has a capacity to store 57,900 acre-feet of water.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) own safety engineers conduct annual inspections, with an independent consultant performing a comprehensive review every five years. The City of Carnation has also been actively participating in the ongoing relicensing process for the dam.



Concerns Raised

Carnation's community has been unsettled by two significant incidents involving the dam's alarm system. The first was on July 28, 2020, when the dam's alarm system failed, causing panic and evacuations within the city.

Although the alarm was determined to be false within a minute, the emotional impact lingered. On August 22, 2023, the alarm failed again, reigniting traumatic memories and evacuation protocols beginning again in the eastern part of Carnation.

Mayor Ribail remarked, *"2,300 residents in Carnation live in constant fear due to the traumatic events in 2020. We have waited three years for reassurances that the Tolt Dam Alarm system is reliable and that Seattle is a responsible operator. We are done waiting."*

Community Forum Planned

To address these concerns, Carnation's civic leadership has organized a community forum inviting Seattle's Mayor and City Council. The aim is to discuss desired changes in the relationship between the two cities concerning the dam's operation. Carnation staff visited Seattle City Hall today to personally deliver the invitations.

Deputy Mayor Harris weighed in, saying, *"The City of Seattle has been able to externalize the costs of its utility services for decades. Whether we're talking about the loss of salmon habitat because of their dam on the Skagit, the billions of dollars of investment we're being asked to take to resolve their sewer overflows into Puget Sound, or in this case, the recurring trauma being inflicted on the City of Carnation due to their Dam on the Tolt, it ends up being the REGION that bears the cost of Seattle's infrastructure. It's time for the Federal Government and the State to make sure that Seattle fixes these problems and that communities like ours, who're constantly being asked to pay the price for Seattle's infrastructure, are made whole."*

Moving Forward

With Carnation's State of Emergency Declaration now in effect, there is mounting pressure on the City of Seattle to urgently address these concerns, as trust in its ability to manage

the Tolt Dam erodes. The upcoming community forum will serve as a pivotal moment for both cities to come to a resolution.

Carnation mayor confronts Seattle City Council over false evacuation alarms for Tolt Dam

By KIRO 7 News Staff September 05, 2023 at 6:16 pm PDT



Live Desk: City of Carnation speaks at Seattle City Council meeting.

SEATTLE — The City of Carnation spoke out about the false Tolt Dam evacuation alarms at Wednesday's Seattle City Council meeting.

Over the past few years, Carnation has had a series of **false alarms** that told residents the Tolt Dam was breaking. If the dam actually broke, the city would flood and people could die.

The mayor of Carnation says he was traumatized by the inadequate alarm system and that a solution needs to be found soon.

Skip

“We’ve been doing this for 3 years, so we would’ve hoped that the city council and SPU would be more responsive to us,” said Mayor Jim Ribail. “We did come down last week to try to set a date to get together with them. There was no date that was soon, so that’s why we came down here today to make sure that they heard us in the public comment.”

Seattle Public Utilities released a statement regarding the false alarms last month.

“Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is currently in active discussions with Carnation officials and our emergency partners on how best to meet community expectations,” said SPU. “Based on feedback from residents on the new Warning System, we are making minor adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, by October.”

Carnation demands Seattle fix dam break warning system that keeps failing

by Joel Moreno, KOMO News Reporter

Wed, September 6th 2023, 1:51 PM PDT







A warning system signaling a catastrophic failure of the Tolt River Dam has failed six times in three years, leaving people in Carnation traumatized by weather they are about to be submerged by floodwaters. (Photo: Seattle Public Utilities)



5

CARNATION, Wash. — False alerts keep triggering in Carnation, warning that the Tolt River Dam has breached and devastating floodwaters will soon submerge the city.

The most recent false alarm happened on Aug. 22, when blaring sirens indicated that floodwaters from a failure in the Tolt River Dam were about to sweep through and submerge the city. It turned out to be a mistake, but city officials said if it had been real, the loss of life would have been extensive.

“So it wouldn't just be water,” said Carnation City Councilmember Adair Hawkins. “It would be trees, it would be cows, it would be cars. It would be like our own fire in Hawaii. It would be death.”

A warning system of loudspeakers atop poles is in place to alert residents to any approaching danger. Models suggest that a worst-case scenario could send a 30-foot tall wall of water barreling through the valley, and residents would have just under an hour to reach higher ground.

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However, the false alerts have people in Carnation beyond frustrated.

“And then there's no way to push out a separate message that says whoops, we made a mistake,” said Deputy Mayor Tim Harris.

Seattle owns the dam, and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is in the process of replacing the warning system. Officials in Carnation said Seattle should make other investments, including drafting a more coordinated communication plan as well as paying for an independent review of any other infrastructure improvements that are needed to keep the city safe.

“We want Seattle to step up and take responsibility for their infrastructure,” Harris said.

The warning system has failed six times in the past three years. Sirens have wailed when they weren't supposed to or stayed silent during scheduled tests.

Many people in Carnation no longer trust the alerts - to the point where they don't bother to head for higher ground at a clearing atop a place known as Evacuation Hill.

Carnation's elected leaders said Seattle needs to act because the faulty alerts put everyone in peril.

"We're asking one thing. Can you just keep our citizens safe? People matter," Hawkins said.

When KOMO News contacted Seattle city officials for additional clarity, a spokesperson for SPU provided this written statement:

"Following the false alarm of the system that sounded in and around Carnation on August 22, SPU has met with city officials several times about the incident and actions we are taking with our emergency management partners to meet community expectations. SPU takes incidents like this seriously and sincerely apologizes for confusion and concern the false alarm caused. We are reviewing and improving our protocols to improve communication including:

Working with our emergency partners, community alerts for residents should another false alarm occur

A "the dam is safe" announcement broadcast at siren speaker locations should another false alarm occur

SPU's top priority is to decommission the old system and commission Carnation's new state-of-the-art Tolt Dam Warning system as soon as possible. Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we are making adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully

transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, by October.

In addition to the early warning system, SPU ensures dam safety in the following ways:

24/7 surveillance and monitoring of the dam

Daily visual dam inspections and instrument readings

Safety and Security Plan

Periodic engineering, federal and independent inspections

Emergency Action Plan”

READ THE COMMENTS (5)

Carnation sent a delegation of elected leaders to testify before the Seattle City Council on Tuesday, expressing the urgency of the need to get these problems resolved. They have also invited Seattle city officials to a special meeting on September 30 to lay out the next steps.

Carnation officials confront Seattle council over Tolt Dam

Concerns continue over the dam's emergency alert system.

By [Conor Wilson](#) • September 12, 2023 11:49 am



Members of the Carnation City Council speak to reporters outside Seattle City Hall on Sept. 5. From left: Tim Harris, Jim Ribail, Ryan Burrell, Adair Hawkins, Dustin Green. Photo by Conor Wilson/Valley Record

Carnation officials didn't mince words as they told members of the Seattle City Council that their city has failed in its management of the Tolt River Dam.

All five members of the Carnation City Council traveled to Seattle City Hall on Sept. 5. Each using their allotted three minutes of public comment, they delivered a unified speech urging for safety improvements on the dam.

Concerns over the dam have heightened over the last three years. The dam's emergency alert system — designed to alert residents of catastrophic flooding — has failed six times over that span, city officials said, including three times in the last year. Those six incidents include false siren alarms, erroneous mass text messages and the sirens failing to sound during weekly testing.

“With each failure, it becomes more and more apparent that Seattle hasn’t addressed a number of foundational issues, and that it simply doesn’t comprehend the harm it’s inflicting,” Mayor Jim Ribail told the Seattle City Council.

The 200-foot-tall Tolt Dam sits 16 miles upstream of Carnation, but is owned and operated by the city of Seattle. Its reservoir provides water for about a dozen providers and 1.5 million people in the Seattle area.

Carnation is not among those providers, but the dam presents an ongoing risk for the city. If it were to fail — which Seattle Public Utilities stresses is unlikely — an estimated 30-foot wave would inundate the Carnation in an hour.

“Seattle’s dam puts all our lives and property at risk,” Ribail said. “We get no benefit from it. We get no revenue from it. Yet we have 100% of the risk.”

Carnation officials have accused Seattle leaders of not coordinating with its partners, fixing the faulty alert system, or providing financial support for evacuation measures and emergency preparedness. The situation has left residents traumatized and fearful, or in some cases apathetic, they said. When the most recent false alarm happened, some residents waited to evacuate and began calling around or checking social media to see if the false alarm was real, Councilmember Dustin Green said.

“Seattle has taken a passive role in its ownership of the dam and its responsibilities to the communities it impacts as operator,” he said. “The failures we’ve outlined aren’t ours to solve. They aren’t King County’s to solve. They aren’t 911’s to solve.”

After the most recent false alarm on Aug. 22, the Carnation City Council unanimously declared a state of emergency over the dam’s warning system. They also invited Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell and the city council to an upcoming forum later this month to discuss the dam.

After that invitation was met without a firm response, Carnation officials said, they went to Seattle to address the council in-person to emphasize the urgency of the situation.

Councilmembers concluded their remarks to Seattle leaders by again inviting them to attend a forum in Carnation on Sept. 30 and join the city in its annual evacuation drill, “Be Dam Ready.”

At the forum, councilmembers plan to discuss a number of new strategies to improve safety on the dam. They include financial support from Seattle, a way to signal if a false alarm has been triggered, and a third party evaluation of evacuation infrastructure, among other things.

A spokesperson for the Seattle City Council did not return an email from the Valley Record seeking comment.

Jamie Housen, a spokesperson for the mayor's office, said they are working with Seattle Public Utilities "to address the issues with the current alarm system impacting the City of Carnation and working to expeditiously advance planned actions to implement the new system to support the safety and peace of mind of Carnation residents."

Carnation residents have been on edge about the dam since a major false alarm in 2020. On a Tuesday afternoon in July, the dam siren rang out for over 40 minutes with the message "the Tolt Dam has failed, please evacuate" blaring through its speakers, Councilmember Adair Hawkins said. The city's 2,000 residents tried to evacuate, she said, and some left their cars as Carnation's lone arterial road became clogged.

"Some older residents and disabled residents, who couldn't make it to the evacuation site, simply waited to die," Hawkins told the council. "Others were injured in their attempt to get to high ground. In the chaos, pets and livestock were lost."

SPU is in the process of overhauling the current alert system on the dam. Crews are working to phase in a new system that they say will improve reliability. The old system is aging and difficult to maintain, a SPU official previously told the council.

Each Wednesday, SPU has been testing both the new and old system, ensuring they are functioning as it attempts to fully transition to a new system.

During the latest false alarm in August, Sabrina Register, a spokesperson for SPU, said last month staff were performing minor work on the "soon to be decommissioned" warning system and accidentally set off an alarm. She said they immediately determined the dam was safe, noting it is monitored 24/7, and alerted partner organizations.

Register said they take recent incidents seriously and apologize for the confusion the false alarms may have caused.

“It is our top priority to decommission the old system and commission Carnation’s new state-of-the-art Tolt Dam Warning System as soon as possible,” she wrote in an email. “Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we are making minor adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, by October.”

Seattle leaders to fix false alarm problems at Tolt Dam

New system will be installed in October; Carnation will hold annual evacuation drill.

By [Conor Wilson](#) • September 26, 2023 12:14 pm



Photo courtesy of Seattle Public Utilities Tolt Dam Reservoir.

Representatives for the mayor of Seattle came to the Carnation City Council meeting Sept. 19 to apologize for recent failures on the Tolt Dam Warning System and announced a series of changes aimed at mitigating future mishaps.

“There’s no sugar coating it, we are making mistakes,” Marco Lowe, Chief Operating Officer for the City of Seattle, told the Carnation Council. “We have to stop.”

The meeting comes as Carnation officials have publicly expressed displeasure with recent failures of the dam’s warning system over the past month, including a recent speech at the Seattle City Council meeting. They are imploring the city of Seattle, which owns the dam, to take recuperative action.

The group of Seattle leaders, who gave a presentation to the council, announced a two-pronged approach to quell a recent string of false and missed alarms of the dam’s emergency warning system.

The warning alarm is designed to sound during a failure of the Tolt Dam — which would inundate the city under an estimated 30 foot wave — but has gone

off erroneously three times in the past few months and six times in the past three years.

Some of those false alarms, including the most recent one on Aug. 22, came as technicians were performing work on the alert system and accidentally sent off the alarm.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), the agency that manages the dam and provides it with around-the-clock monitoring, is in the process of replacing the dam's old warning system, installed in the late 1970s, which they say is difficult to maintain and has led to many recent false alarms.

Andrew Lee, general manager of SPU, called the recent false alarms unacceptable, and said technicians would work "expeditiously" to change over to a more stable alert system.

"This is absolutely unacceptable for me as the leader of utilities, it's unacceptable to you, and it is unacceptable to all the residents and businesses it's impacted," he said. "We can and we will do better."

SPU has been performing regularly scheduled weekly tests on both the old and new systems each Wednesday as it looks to phase in a new alert system. Lee said SPU will fully switch over to the new system by Oct. 18, with the old system last sounding on Oct. 11.

SPU officials said the new system will be the single most important step to preventing future false alarms.

"The vast majority of issues with false alarms have been due to the old system," said Josh Campbell, project manager for the warning system update. "Simply put, it's an outdated system that is difficult to maintain and has too many variables that can lead to a false alarm."

During the August incident, for example, technicians were repairing an old siren antenna downtown when they accidentally pushed the siren button and triggered a false alarm. The input was canceled, but it was too late to cancel the siren command, Campbell said.

The new system is less prone to these mishaps, requiring the button be held for at least a second, Campbell said. The new system also allows for SPU staff to see almost in real time if there's local activation of the siren.

Additionally, Campbell said, SPU has instituted additional precautionary measures when technicians perform work on the old alert system, including notifying Carnation City Manager Ana Cortez of planned maintenance and disconnecting speaker amplifiers during that work.

In the event of another false alarm, SPU also committed to directly communicate with Cortez and broadcast “all clear” messages over the warning system’s sirens, alerting residents the dam is safe.

Implementation of the new alert system is part of phase 1 of the SPU’s overhaul of the Tolt Dam Warning System. Through 2024, they will continue adding additional sirens, static evacuation signs and making other infrastructure improvements.

Be Dam Ready

Recent advocacy for dam improvements comes as Carnation is prepared to host Be Dam Ready, its annual dam evacuation drill, on Sept. 30.

New for this year’s event, a listening session will be held at 10.m. for residents to voice their concerns about recent false alarms. Local, state, federal and Tribal leaders as well as a representative from Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell’s office have been invited.

Cortez, the city manager, said members of the Seattle City Council — who were also invited — will not be attending, but acknowledged Council President Debora Juarez has asked for a written report of the event.

“They are paying attention to it because you educated them,” Cortez told the city council. “For most of them [the false alarms] was news and now it isn’t. That is reassuring.”

The evacuation drill begins at 12:30 p.m.

‘The community is very traumatized’: Carnation residents air grievances over Tolt Dam false alarms

By [Brittany Toolis, KIRO 7 News](#) September 30, 2023 at 6:21 pm PDT



VIDEO: ‘The community is very traumatized’: Carnation residents air grievances over Tolt Dam false alarms

CARNATION, Wash. — Carnation residents came face to face with [Seattle Public Utilities](#) to air their grievances over panic-inducing false alarms they’ve experienced over the last few years.

The alarms should signal that the Tolt Dam has failed, giving residences an hour to evacuate the area before it floods. However, false alarms have sounded six times over the last three years with no emergency.

Carnation's City Manager Ana Cortez said that the false alarms cause the community to be on edge.

"That dam has had six faulty events in the last three years. The community is on edge, the community is stressed, the community is very traumatized," said Cortez. "If an alarm system is not reliable, two things happen. People ignore it, or people get very nervous. Either outcome is a negative outcome."

Seattle Public Utilities controls the Tolt Dam. The reservoir provides drinking water to 500,000 people in Seattle and its surrounding areas but not Carnation.

The Carnation City Council **declared a state of emergency** after the most recent false alarm in August. The Carnation Mayor stepped outside of official channels and addressed the Seattle City Council during public comment at one of their meetings.

"Right now, the city of Carnation has 100% of the risks associated with that dam and 0% of the benefits," said Cortez.

The first false alarm sounded in July 2020, which prompted the city to start its evacuation process. Traffic quickly came to a standstill, so residents were forced to get out of their cars and climb on foot.

"The fear is you get in your car, and you're stuck in your car going nowhere. So, we would do it [climb the hill] assuming a lot of people would be going up so we could maybe get some help going up there. It's a mud path, curvy and parts of it have loose gravel so it's not the safest road on the initial climb and then it's just a longer zig-zag route," said Rosemary Neff, who's lived in Carnation since 1985.

Seattle Public Utilities CEO and General Manager Andrew Lee listened Saturday morning as resident after resident aired their concerns.

"It's absolutely something that we feel a huge obligation in making sure that we take that away from the community that they don't have to live that continuously," said Lee.

Seattle Public Utilities said they expect to have the new early warning system up and running by October 18. When asked why it took three years between the first false alarm and the new system's expected installation, Lee pointed to the bureaucratic process.

"Dam early warning systems are incredibly complex. We have bid guidelines, rules, and regulations. We have to go out to public bid on this and there is a complex design process that we go through followed by a bid process, then the construction process. All of that typically takes a long time," said Lee.

He also acknowledged the issues with the evacuation plan and said they want to improve that as well.

"Things like signage, as well as in terms of planning, getting more word out to the community, making sure folks are aware where they're supposed to be driving where they're supposed to be waking," explained Lee.

A woman told us that the issue goes past the Carnation borders since the Riverview School District includes students from surrounding cities.

'People were so traumatized'; Carnation city leaders demand action on Seattle's Tolt Dam

By Nikki Torres

Published October 5, 2023

Carnation

FOX 13 Seattle

Carnation wants action on Tolt River Dam

People in Carnation have spoken, and they are done living with risk of the Tolt River Dam collapsing, especially since they have seen none of the reward from the water it supplies.

CARNATION, Wash. - People in Carnation have spoken, and they are done living with risk of the Tolt River Dam collapsing, especially since they have seen none of the reward from the water it supplies.

The dam belongs to the City of Seattle, which has been scrambling to reassure the town they're safe, following a false alarm that sent the community scrambling for high ground.

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More than 200 people attended the public forum regarding the future of Tolt Dam.

Tolt Dam sits above the city of Carnation, with a population of about 2,200 people. If the dam were to get damaged, it could cause irreparable destruction and a citywide evacuation.

"On Saturday, we heard from some people who were so traumatized from the July 28 incident, they actually leave town on Wednesdays, so they don't have to listen to the alarm," said Ana Cortez, Carnation's City Manager.

To assure people in Carnation are prepared for a possible disaster, every Wednesday, an alarm sounds throughout the city.

"Anything that happens not on a Wednesday is the real deal," Cortez said.

In 2020, a false alarm rang throughout the community for more than 40 minutes.

"People panicked, people cried, people injured themselves, folks tried to collect their animals," Cortez said.

The PTSD from that false alarm three years ago still affects many of the community members. Last Saturday's meeting was for their concerns to be heard by Carnation and Seattle leaders.

"In '62, the City of Seattle built a dam that has the ability to completely destroy the City of Carnation, but there were no terms negotiated with the City of Carnation," Cortez said.

Cortez said the people of carnation are burdened with the risk of losing everything at any point in time, if something happened to the Tolt Dam. Yet, they don't get anything in return.

"We get zero benefits from that dam right now," Cortez said. "All of that water [is] for Seattle and the agencies that buy water from Seattle. Not one drop comes to the City of Carnation, because we have our own water source—we don't need that dam."

Problems with Tolt Dam early warning system siren prompted the City of Carnation to adopt a state of emergency declaration this past August.

The declaration was adopted unanimously by the Carnation City Council, that's because of its concerns and doubts about the City of Seattle's ability to operate the Tolt Dam.

In a statement to FOX 13, the City of Seattle said:

"Seattle Public Utilities' top priority is to decommission the old Tolt Dam early warning system and commission Carnation's new, state-of-the-art early warning system as soon as possible.

Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we are making minor adjustments and anticipate decommissioning the old system and fully transitioning to the new system, which will provide better reliability and resiliency, on October 18."

Representatives from both Seattle and Carnation are now scheduled to negotiate a community benefit agreement that could include mitigation and franchise fees.

New warning system installed on Tolt Dam

Officials say the replacement will be the most important step in preventing future false alarms.

By [Conor Wilson](#) • October 18, 2023 12:30 pm



File photo Tolt Dam Reservoir.

Seattle Public Utilities will fully activate the new Tolt Dam Warning System on Oct. 18, fully replacing the old system and – residents hope – ending a recent string of distressing false alarms.

The aged and outdated old system rang out for the last time during its regularly scheduled weekly test on Oct. 11. The following week, the dam will fully transitioned to a new “state-of-the-art” alert system, SPU said in a statement.

The warning system is designed to alert residents of failure on the Tolt Dam, a breakdown that would lead to catastrophic flooding in Carnation. Over the past three years, however, the system has experienced six false alarms, including three in recent months.

Officials with the city of Seattle, which owns the dam, say replacing the old system that was installed in 1993 will be the single most important step in preventing future false alarms.

“The vast majority of issues with false alarms have been due to the old system,” said Josh Campbell, project manager for the warning system update.

“Simply put, it’s an outdated system that is difficult to maintain and has too many variables that can lead to a false alarm.”

During an August incident, for example, technicians were repairing an old siren antenna downtown when they accidentally pushed the siren button and triggered a false alarm. The input was canceled, but it was too late to cancel the siren command, Campbell said.

The new system is less prone to these mishaps, requiring the button be held for at least a second, Campbell said. The new system also allows for SPU staff to see almost in real time if there’s local activation of the siren.

SPU expects to continue working on the alert system and related infrastructure over the next year. Technicians will work to enhance the current alert system, install a series of new indoor and outdoor sirens, add electronic signage on the highway and fix evacuation signs.

The Carnation City Council declared a state of emergency over the dam’s false alarms in August and requested the Seattle City Council take action to address solutions of the dam.

The last ring out of the old system comes a little over a week after the city of Carnation held a community meeting at Tolt Middle School alongside state and federal leaders discussing the recent false alarms. The city estimated 200 people were in attendance.

In an interview, Carnation City Manager Ana Cortez said following the meeting the city is working alongside SPU to gather more information about the dam and its warning system. Cortez said they plan to continue discussions with Seattle officials, including things like penalties for false alarms and compensation for funds spent on mitigation measures.

The City of Seattle Fails to Deliver Fully Operating Emergency Warning System for Carnation Residents

NOVEMBER 12, 2023 BY [MELISSA GRANT SNOQUALMIE VALLEY INFO](#)



The City of Carnation has scheduled a press conference to express their disappointment with the City of Seattle's Tolt Dam Early Warning System. The Tolt Dam, owned and operated by the City of Seattle, would cause catastrophic damage to Carnation and force city-wide evacuation if it ever were to break.

In the wake of distrust and general unease surrounding the Tolt Dam from residents after a string of false alarms, the City of Carnation hosted a [community forum on September 30th](#).

"We value protecting life through our services, and clearly, we have failed in doing that for all of you," shared Seattle Mayor's representative Andrew Lee with Carnation citizens at the forum.

“The false alarms have largely been caused by an old and outdated system...beginning on October 18th, the new system will be activated,” said Mayor Harrell’s representative. He then went on to say that the new system is *“far superior”* and that the City of Seattle has *“a lot of confidence in this new state-of-the-art system.”*

“The new Tolt Dam Early Warning system that was inaugurated on October 18 is inadequate and has created yet another wave of concerns,” the City of Carnation released in an October 26th Facebook post. *“The message is inaudible in many parts of our City.”*

In response to complaints that the new siren is harder to hear and understand than it was previously, the City of Seattle posted the following update on the Tolt Dam Early Warning System project web page on October 24th: *“It’s important to note that the siren system is primarily an outdoor warning system and it may not be audible indoors depending on many conditions such as topography, wind direction, and ambient noise like running faucets or televisions.”*

In addition to volume and clarity concerns, the City of Carnation calls for increased levels of communication and improved project management practices.

The City of Seattle told the City of Carnation that Siren 8 would be relocated to the City Public Works yard by the Fall of 2023. Upon learning that Seattle would not be able to adhere to their own timeline, the City of Carnation scheduled an appointment with a representative of the Mayor of Seattle to escalate the issue further.

Click below to view a video recapping the September 30th community forum:

[**Tolt Dam Community Forum & Evacuation Drill – City of Carnation on Vimeo**](#)

Click below to view Tolt Dam news coverage:

[**Tolt Dam News Coverage 2020-PRESENT.pdf \(carnationwa.gov\)**](#)

PRESS CONFERENCE DETAILS:

Time: 11:30 AM

Date: Wednesday, November 15th, 2023

Location: Nick Loutsis Park (32401 Entwistle St, Carnation, WA 98014)

[Information provided by the City of Carnation. For more information, contact City Manager Ana Cortez at ana.cortez@carnationwa.gov or via cell at (425) 419-3697.]

Carnation leaders say dam breach system still problematic after city of Seattle's fix

by Joel Moreno, KOMO News Reporter

Mon, November 13th 2023, 12:10 PM PST



A look at downtown Carnation, Wash., located in eastern King County, on Nov. 13, 2023. (KOMO News)

CARNATION, Wash. — People in Carnation are running out of patience with city leaders in Seattle over a dam breach warning system they claim doesn't work. Seattle just upgraded the equipment after a series of false alarms caused people to panic, but some Carnation residents said the new sirens are hard to hear.

A warning system of loudspeakers was installed around Carnation to alert residents to the danger if the Tolt River Dam ever suffered a catastrophic breach. That level of damage could unleash a 30-foot wall of water that could smash through large sections of the city.

"Run to the hills if it floods," said Marque Pounds of Carnation. "This whole area is pretty much doomed."

However, sometimes the warning system triggered false alarms, or it didn't work at all during routine testing.

"So from 2020 to 2023, there have been six different instances where the system was faulty," said Carnation City Manager Ana Cortez. "We had heard from Seattle Public Utilities how a lot of the problems that we were having were to be resolved with the new system."

ALSO SEE | [Carnation demands Seattle fix dam break warning system that keeps failing](#)

The city of Seattle owns the dam, and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) agreed to upgrade the [Tolt Dam Early Warning System](#) to eliminate the false alarms, which set off mass panic when people scrambled to evacuate. The trouble is that the new system is hard for some to hear.

"I definitely think that they should do something so people can hear it because it's going to be serious if they don't," said Lindsey Schold, who lives and works in Carnation. "I can't hear it when it goes off so I forget about it."

Pounds said it was also a concern for him.

"Lately I haven't heard pretty much of anything out here. It's been quiet. The dogs don't bark anymore whenever the sirens go off," Pounds said.

The sirens are audible in many neighborhoods but some community members said they don't hear the weekly tests at all if they are indoors.

"You can hear it up on top of the mountain. You can hear it probably a mile and a half down the road. It may be too much insulation in people's houses if they can't hear it but I can hear the thing," said Carnation resident Gregory Dunham.

A spokesperson for Seattle Public Utilities shared this statement on the recent complaints:

"On October 18, Seattle Public Utilities fulfilled its promise to the Carnation community to fully transition to the new Early Tolt Dam Early Warning System. Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we continue to make improvements on the system's sound volume and quality, including upgrading all speakers, speaker amplifiers and re-recording voice messages.

We are also reviewing and enhancing current protocols to include communications like:

- In cooperation with our emergency partners, text alert notifications for residents should another false alarm occur*
- A "the dam is safe" announcement broadcast at siren speaker locations should another false alarm occur*

In addition to the Early Warning System, SPU ensures dam safety in the follow ways:

- 24/7 surveillance and monitoring of the dam*
- Daily visual inspections and instrument readings*
- Safety and Security Plan*
- Periodic engineering, federal, and independent inspections*
- Emergency Action Plan"*

Carnation city officials said having a life-saving warning system that not everyone can hear is clearly a problem, and Seattle needs to come through on what was promised.

"The system that we were waiting for, it has been a disappointment," Cortez said.

Carnation is now considering the possibility of imposing fines and mitigation fees on Seattle. City officials are also reaching out to federal regulators to intervene.

Carnation says its time for Seattle to pay up, calling new Tolt River Dam sirens a complete failure

By [Lauren Donovan](#)

Published November 15, 2023

[Carnation](#)

[FOX 13 Seattle](#)

Fixing false alarms: Failed warning system at Tolt River Dam

After declaring a state of emergency over false alarms at the Tolt River Dam, community leaders in Carnation are now saying a new siren warning system is a complete failure.

CARNATION, Wash. - After declaring a state of emergency over false alarms at the Tolt River Dam, community leaders in [Carnation](#) are now saying a new siren warning system is a complete failure.

Speakers at a public safety news conference Wednesday morning say this shortcoming is just another slap in the face from the dam's owner, the [city of Seattle](#).

A handful of Carnation residents argue the problem with the new technology is it's difficult to hear indoors.

"Even for me living right across the street from it, it's far more difficult to hear and understand compared to the previous one," said Greg Jamiel.

"If we pause all conversation in our downtown building, we can barely make it out," said Laura Smith.

Back on October 18, Seattle Public Utilities decommissioned the old system which, over a span of six years, sounded six different false alarms. Seattle Public Utilities acknowledged growing frustration with the new network in a statement sent to FOX 13:

"We continue to make improvements to the system's sound volume and quality, including upgrading all speakers, speaker amplifiers and re-recording voice messages. We are working to complete these additional improvements as quickly as possible. We expect all three items to be completed by January 2024. There is also a Phase II to this project which expands the capabilities of the alerting system beyond the original system. These enhancements include additional indoor alerting devices, new static signs, and highway message signs, and we expect this phase to be completed by the end of 2024."

Related



'People were so traumatized'; Carnation city leaders demand action on Seattle's Tolt Dam

People in Carnation have spoken, and they are done living with risk of the Tolt River Dam collapsing, especially since they have seen none of the reward from the water it supplies.

Carnation Mayor Jim Ribail sees these promises as half-baked. He's come up with a new tactic to hold the city of Seattle to account.

"If we have to do anything to make our citizens safe, the city of Seattle will receive a bill for that," said Ribail.

City Manager Ana Cortez shared the city plans to collect on maintenance to the evacuation route.

"We are also charging for services connected to the mental state of this community," said Cortez. "Do we expect them to just write us a check probably not, but it begins to be a conversation."

Carnation leaders, citizens frustrated with Seattle's 'inadequate' Tolt River Dam emergency system

In the event of a dam collapse, Carnation mayor Jim Ribail said the city would be inundated with over 15 feet of water.



Author: Quixem Ramirez

Published: 1:46 PM PST November 15, 2023

Updated: 11:08 PM PST November 15, 2023

CARNATION, Wash. — City leaders and citizens in Carnation criticized the City of Seattle's new Tolt Dam warning alarm on Wednesday afternoon and called for an improved system to help the community prepare.

Seattle city leaders told Carnation a "far superior" alarm would be in place starting on Oct. 18, but Carnation Mayor Jim Ribail said the warning system has been inadequate for the city.

The previous Tolt River Dam warning system, designed to warn of a breach in the earthen dam holding back the Tolt reservoir, [did not sound three times](#) during tests from late 2020 to early 2021.

City officials said Wednesday there have been [six false alarms in Carnation](#) over the last three years.

"The City of Seattle needs to have a better system than the one they just de-commissioned," Ribail said at a press conference Wednesday. "That was the promise made by the City of Seattle and (Seattle Public Utilities). Right now we do not have that system in place. It's inadequate and it's not working to the level that it should be."

The dam, which is 16 miles upstream from Carnation, is owned and operated by the City of Seattle. If the dam fails, it could be devastating for the residents of Carnation.

In the event of a collapse, Ribail said Carnation would be inundated with over 15 feet of water.

"Our tallest building in Carnation would be under 10 feet of water," Ribail said. "The City of Carnation would not be here. The river system would not be here. The impacts it would have on lives and the future of this valley would be devastating."

Kira Avery, executive director of the Sno Valley Senior Center in Carnation, said a false alarm in 2020 happened as the center was preparing to deliver 50 lunches across the area.

"The 2020 false alarm was a wake-up call for us to get better prepared, but we also need to trust the alarm system that is responsible for alerting an entire city about an impending disaster and that's not something we can do right now," Avery said. "The false alarms that have happened have caused confusion and anxiety. We worry that the longer this goes on the alarm will be taken less seriously if an emergency is actually occurring."

Ribail said the community has been "devastated" by the effects of recent false alarms.

"The first time that it went off we had seniors walk into their yard and wait for a wall of water to come down," Ribail said. "They thought they were going to

die. We had people in their wheelchairs who just sat there and cried because they thought they were going to die."

Greg Jamiel, who lives across the street from the sirens, said he has trouble hearing the new alarms.

"Unfortunately the new alert system is inaudible in many parts of the city," Jamiel said. "Even for me, living across the street from it, it's far more difficult to hear and understand compared to the previous one. The City of Seattle has overcommitted and underperformed which is unacceptable when the safety of our Carnation community is at stake."

After receiving many complaints from Carnation residents, the City of Seattle shared an update on the [Tolt Dam Early Warning System website](#).

"It's important to note that the siren system is primarily an outdoor warning system and it may not be audible indoors depending on many conditions such as topography, wind direction, and ambient noise like running faucets or televisions," the City of Seattle wrote on the Tolt Dam Early Warning System project website.

Ribail said the City of Carnation started a yearly dam safety evacuation drill with "zero input from Seattle." The drill is held on the last Saturday in September, allowing citizens to walk from their homes to the evacuation site in the case of an emergency.

The problems with the new alert system, Ribail said, need to be fixed immediately.

"Tomorrow," Ribail said. "We've waited three years. It's time for them to step up. I don't know how much more clear I can be about this. It's three years of promises and broken promises and broken promises. The latest broken promise is that we would have a better system than we had that was a 40-year-old system. Right now we have a brand new 'state-of-the-art system' that is a complete failure. It's time to fix it. And it's time to fix it tomorrow."

Carnation mayor slams Seattle's new's Tolt River Dam Warning system



Carnation mayor Jim Ribail said the City of Seattle needs to fix the alarm warning system by "tomorrow."

Author: king5.com

Published: 1:46 PM PST November 15, 2023

Updated: 1:46 PM PST November 15, 2023

LOCAL

City of Carnation urging for dam warning system to be fixed as false alarms cause mass panic

By [Louie Tran, KIRO 7 News](#) November 15, 2023 at 7:58 pm PST



VIDEO: Demanding action on tolt dam

CARNATION, Wash. — Leaders with the City of Carnation are urging the City of Seattle to fix the Tolt Dam early warning system to keep residents safe after six false alarms happened in the past three years.

Seattle Public Utilities controls the Tolt Dam. The reservoir provides drinking water to around 500,000 people in Seattle and its surrounding areas, but not Carnation.

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Leaders of the City of Carnation and non-profit organizations held a press conference at Nick Loutsis Park on Entwistle Street Wednesday at 11:30 a.m.

Messages and thoughts expressed at the event were filled with frustration and concerns.

“All of our citizens are suffering from some level of PTSD,” said Mayor of Carnation Jim Ribail. “It’s one of my biggest concerns because when that alarm goes off people are actually pausing and saying, ‘Is this really an alarm? Should I really evacuate?’”

KIRO 7 asked Mayor Ribail about the causes behind the false alerts.

“We’ve had several different explanations on the different ones, but each turn, there’s a different reason for the false alarm,” he said.

We also asked Ribail about the number of times he had reached out to the City of Seattle within the past years to address the issue.

“Lost count,” he said.

Ribail said the latest system installed by the City of Seattle does not work correctly to keep residents safe.

Residents were able to hear the alerts - with the prior system - from inside their homes, he added, however, many people now have a difficult time with the latest technology.

Sabrina Warren, transportation supervisor with Riverview School District, which has more than 3,000 students, recalled the past false alarms.

“I was here the day we had the false alarm in the summertime, and it was pandemonium in the city,” she said. “There was chaos in the streets. The system kept going off, over and over again, saying it was a breach. People in the City of Carnation were in hysterics. They were driving over people’s lawns. They were

carrying pets. They were carrying belongings because they never thought they would be able to come back to their homes.”



+Caption

When asked about the new system, Warren said, “Our building (school), we actually have to step out on Wednesdays at 12 O’clock to actually hear that alarm system right here.” She added, “It panics me or scares me because I feel like this has gone on for a really long time. And this is a serious business we have out here. We have lives. This is a community in the Snoqualmie Valley. And our students, and our staff and our community members are important.”

SENIOR CENTER:

To better understand the new system’s impact, KIRO 7 News spoke with Kira Avery, executive director of Sno-Valley Senior Center, located on Stephens Avenue.

She remembered the terrifying moment when she and her organization heard the first false alarm in July of 2020.

“Scared. Scared for all of the people that we know who live here who might not have the easiest way to get out of town.” She added, “They were really scared.”

The senior center sees on average 1,200 people a year, with up to 80 people a day.

“We’re supposed to have this new system that’s supposed to work, and we barely hear it at the senior center anymore,” she said.

When a test alarm sounded off in the City of Carnation on Wednesday at 12 p.m., Reed Larson, a senior member of the center, said, “I didn’t hear it.”

However, he understands the risks of the new system and if the dam were to break.

“That’s going to be tough if water is going to come rushing. They’re (senior members at the center) going to die. People are going to die,” he said.

“It kind of scares me for other people. I got a lot of friends here.” He added, “I have friends here, and I love these people. They’re good people.”

Aletha Littlefield, another senior member of the center, said the false alarms have sent a dangerous message to the community.

“With these false alarms, we’re not taking it serious.” She added, “It puts everyone on edge. We can’t trust the system.”

She stressed to the City of Seattle to, “Make it safe for Carnation to be able to stay here, live here without fear.”

CITY OF SEATTLE:

KIRO 7 News reached out to the Seattle Mayor’s office. We’re still waiting to hear back.

We also reached out to Seattle Public Utilities.



+Caption

A spokesperson declined our interview request. She shared the following statement after KIRO 7 News had asked for clarifying details on SPU's original statement.

“On October 18, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) fulfilled its promise to the Carnation community to fully transition to the new Early Tolt Dam Early Warning System. The new alarm system, currently in use, provides the same service and functionality as the system it replaced, but with more modern and reliable components. Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we continue to make improvements to the system's sound volume and quality, including upgrading all speakers, speaker amplifiers and re-recording voice messages.

We are working to complete these additional improvements as quickly as possible. We expect all three items to be completed by January 2024. There is also a Phase II to this project which expands the capabilities of the alerting system beyond the original system. These enhancements include additional

indoor alerting devices, new static signs, and highway message signs, and we expect this phase to be completed by the end of 2024.”

The spokesperson also said that Seattle Public Utilities has worked with its emergency management partners and enhanced current protocols to include updated communication, including:

- Text alert notifications for residents, should another false alarm happen
- A “the dam is safe” announcement broadcast (in English and Spanish), should another false alarm happen
- Direct communications to the City of Carnation
- Assistance with the City of Carnations’ social media updates

The spokesperson also said SPU is working to ensure safety with the following measures:

- 24/7 surveillance and monitoring of the dam
- Daily visual inspections and instrument readings
- Safety and security plan
- Periodic engineering, federal and independent inspections
- Emergency action plan

The early warning system cost taxpayers around \$10 million.

When asked what may be causing the false alarms, SPU said the early warning system, prior to the October 18 update, was last updated in 1993.

Carnation city leaders consider fines, federal intervention over faulty dam warning system in Seattle

by Joel Moreno, KOMO News Reporter

Wed, November 15th 2023, 5:29 PM PST







A warning system signaling a catastrophic failure of the Tolt River Dam has failed six times in three years, leaving people in Carnation traumatized by weather they are about to be submerged by floodwaters. (Photo: Seattle Public Utilities)

CARNATION, Wash. — City leaders in Carnation may turn to fines and federal intervention to push Seattle into fixing a warning system they said has not worked properly for years.

Seattle just installed a new network of sirens around Carnation that is meant to warn residents to immediately evacuate in the event of a catastrophic breach of the Tolt River Dam, which is upstream from the city. The system was activated on Oct. 18 to replace a previous system that was outdated and faulty.

“Unfortunately the new siren is inaudible in many parts of the city,” said Greg Jamiel, founder of SnoValley Pride and a resident of Carnation.

Laura Smith works in downtown Carnation as the executive director of Empower Youth Network. She also can't hear the weekly siren tests.

RELATED: [Carnation leaders say dam breach system still problematic after city of Seattle's fix](#)

"If we pause all conversation in our downtown building, we can barely make it out. If there's any noise at all, then we completely miss it," Smith said.

Seattle owns the dam and installed the warning system after Carnation residents kept complaining about false alarms, which triggered widespread panic in the community.

The replacement system was supposed to fix that, but Carnation city leaders said it didn't. On Wednesday, they held a press conference to highlight the issues.

"Right now, we have a brand new, state-of-the-art system that is a complete failure," said Carnation Mayor Jim Ribail. "Not all of our residents can hear the new system anymore."

The prospect of the south fork of the Tolt River turning into a wall of water that would leave much of the downtown area submerged has Carnation demanding that better safeguards be in place. During the press conference, city leaders said they will be meeting with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) later this month. Among the topics is a request to potentially block the dam's licensing renewal.

RELATED: [Carnation demands Seattle fix dam break warning system that keeps failing](#)

"The biggest thing that the city is actually thinking about right now - in addition to the citizens - is protesting the FERC from recommissioning of the dam," Ribail said. "And if the FERC recommissioning doesn't happen, Seattle is going to lose a third of its water and over \$30 million in revenue a year."

Carnation is also drawing up a bill for Seattle to pay as reimbursement for all the costs related to the dam and the warning system failures.

"So our invoice begins in 2020, and there is one invoice for every year," said Carnation City Manager Ana Cortez. "The invoice is for a number of years and multiple reasons. Then we will sit down and negotiate. Do we expect them to just write us a check? Probably not, but it begins to be a conversation."

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), which oversees the warning system, sent an updated statement on the steps they are taking to address the concerns being raised:

On October 18, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) fulfilled its promise to the Carnation community to fully transition to the new Early Tolt Dam Early Warning System. The new alarm system, currently in use, provides the same service and functionality as the system it replaced, but with more modern and reliable components. Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we continue to make improvements to the system's sound volume and quality, including upgrading all speakers, speaker amplifiers and re-recording voice messages.

We are working to complete these additional improvements as quickly as possible. We expect all three items to be completed by January 2024. There is also a Phase II to this project which expands the capabilities of

the alerting system beyond the original system. These enhancements include additional indoor alerting devices, new static signs, and highway message signs, and we expect this phase to be completed by the end of 2024.

Additionally, we have worked with our emergency management partners and enhanced current protocols to include communications like

In cooperation with our emergency partners, text alert notifications for residents should another false alarm occur

A “the dam is safe” announcement broadcast (in English and Spanish) at siren speaker locations should another false alarm occur

Direct communications to City of Carnation officials and assistance with Carnation’s social media updates

In addition to the Early Warning System, SPU ensures dam safety in the follow ways:

- ***24/7 surveillance and monitoring of the dam***
- ***Daily visual inspections and instrument readings***
- ***Safety and Security Plan***
- ***Periodic engineering, federal, and independent inspections***
- ***Emergency Action Plan***

MYNORTHWEST NEWS

Carnation officials blast Seattle after new problem with Tolt River Dam alert system

Nov 16, 2023, 2:57 AM | Updated: 2:40 pm



(Photo courtesy of KIRO 7)

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BY KATE STONE

KIRO Newsradio Reporter

After enduring multiple false alarms warning of a breach at the Tolt River Dam, Carnation residents say they are facing a new

problem with the dam's newly installed alert system – and they blame the city of Seattle for it.

The dam, which is 16 miles upstream from Carnation, is owned and operated by the City of Seattle and supplies much of that city's electricity. It would cause catastrophic damage to Carnation and force a city-wide evacuation if it ever were to break, according to City Manager Ana Cortez.

Cortez told KIRO Newsradio the alert system is not reliable and has broadcasted six false alarms in Carnation over the last three years. Last month, city of Seattle crews installed a new system they said was "far superior." Sabrina Register with Seattle Public Utilities said in a statement the upgraded version "provides the same service and functionality as the system it replaced, but with more modern and reliable components."

More on Carnation: [City of Carnation declares state of emergency after latest false evacuation alarm](#)

But Cortez claimed it has been inadequate.

"We have folks in different parts of the city who can't hear it," Cortez said. "We have messages that are transmitted along with the siren that are difficult to understand as well."

In response to complaints the new siren is harder to hear and understand than it was previously, the City of Seattle posted the following update on the Tolt Dam Early Warning System project web page Oct. 24.

"It's important to note that the siren system is primarily an outdoor warning system and it may not be audible indoors depending on many conditions such as topography, wind

direction, and ambient noise like running faucets or televisions,” the update read.

But Cortez said that presents a problem.

“The system is supposed to alert people who are out and about if you are in your home, we are counting on you to be near your phone to receive a notification from multiple partners, that’s that’s the logic,” she said. “But where that logic breaks down for us is that we do not trust any of the partners in this equation. King County has failed to provide leadership. The emergency response team has failed to provide leadership in this matter.”

Problems with the Tolt Dam Early Warning System siren prompted the city of Carnation to unanimously adopt a state of emergency declaration in August, due to its concerns and doubts about the city of Seattle’s ability to operate the dam.

“If you’re outside of Carnation, I think it’s very difficult for people to understand the level of trauma inflicted on this community,” Cortez said.

She stated each incident has caused more fear and mistrust among the community of more than 2,200 residents.

“We have individuals who have physical reactions on Wednesdays at noon when the alarm system goes off – and even worse reactions when the system doesn’t go off,” Cortez added.

She and other city officials want to brief the incoming Seattle City Council members, as well as other city staff, about the alert system. “Carnation will no longer be an afterthought,” she said.

In response, Seattle Public Utilities said it is listening and acting on Carnation residents' feedback.

"We continue to make improvements to the system's sound volume and quality, including upgrading all speakers, speaker amplifiers and re-recording voice messages," the department's statement read. "We expect all three items to be completed by January 2024. There is also a Phase II to this project which expands the capabilities of the alerting system beyond the original system. These enhancements include additional indoor alerting devices, new static signs, and highway message signs, and we expect this phase to be completed by the end of 2024."

And according to the Washington St Emergency Communications Committee, there are multiple alternative indoor warning system options as well. These include the Alert King County notification system, which residents can opt into, and the Reverse 911 system, which delivers recorded notifications to people in a certain geographic location during an emergency.

The Seattle office of the National Weather Service (NWS) is also responsible for flash flood watches and warnings throughout much of Western Washington, including dam failure scenarios such as the Tolt River Dam project. Using the NOAA Weather Radio All-Hazards network, the NWS can activate the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA). Residents can get access to these alerts by purchasing a NOAA Weather Radio, which can cost between \$30 - \$100 dollars on average.

Cortez acknowledged that, since August, when the state of emergency was declared, there has been more attention devoted to fixing the ongoing issues. But she still wants to see more done and a stronger partnership established between the two cities.

“The problem didn’t just start in 2020. Seattle has had this dam since 1962,” she said. “So thanks for the progress. It’s a little late.”

You can read more about the Tolt River Dam project on the Seattle Public Utilities Department [website](#).

Carnation leaders demand action on Tolt Dam Warning System

Mayor to Seattle: “It’s been three years of broken promises.”

By [Conor Wilson](#) • November 17, 2023 11:13 am



Carnation Mayor Jim Ribail speaks to reporters during a press conference Nov. 15 at Nick Loutsis Park in Carnation on Nov. 15. Photo by Conor Wilson/Valley Record

After what he described as three years of waiting, Carnation Mayor Jim Ribail is demanding immediate action be taken to fix the Tolt River Dam Warning System.

Speaking to reporters during a press conference Nov. 15 at Nick Loutsis Park, Ribail said the city of Seattle has for years neglected its management of the dam’s alert system, emphasizing that its recent efforts to remedy the situation had failed.

“We are calling on the city of Seattle, the mayor’s office, the newly elected city council to make this a priority next year [and] get this fixed,” Ribail said. “It’s been three years of broken promises.”

The city-organized press conference comes about a month after [a new dam siren system was installed](#) — which city leaders say is faulty — and is the latest effort from Carnation leaders to underscore their frustrations and [urge action from Seattle leadership](#). City officials have been pushing for action on the dam's alert system since August, saying it poses a significant public safety risk to the city's 2,200 residents.

The dam, owned by the city of Seattle, sits about 16 miles upstream of Carnation. If it were to fail — which officials stress is unlikely — a 30-foot wave would inundate Carnation and cause devastating impacts to the lower Valley.

Carnation residents have been on edge about the dam since a major false alarm in 2020, when the dam siren rang out for over 40 minutes with the message “The Tolt Dam has failed, please evacuate” blaring over its speakers. The situation prompted a chaotic evacuation that city leaders say still weighs heavily on residents.

Five additional alarms have occurred since then, although none with the same severity, prompting the Carnation City Council to [declare a state of emergency](#) in August.

“The subsequent false alarms have caused confusion and anxiety,” Kira Avery, executive director of the SnoValley Senior Center, said at the press conference. “We worry the longer this goes on, the alarm will be taken less seriously if an emergency is actually occurring.”

Many of those false alarms came as technicians with Seattle Public Utilities were working on the installation of a new alert system. Seattle officials said many of the false alarms were the result of the old alert system, and a new system would help alleviate them.

“The vast majority of issues with false alarms have been due to the old system,” Josh Campbell, project manager for the warning system update, previously told the Carnation City Council. “Simply put, it's an outdated system that is difficult to maintain and has too many variables that can lead to a false alarm.”

Seattle Public Utilities fully transitioned to the new alert system on Oct. 18, but Carnation residents say the new system has been rife with its own challenges. While false alarms have not been triggered, the new siren is much quieter and cannot be heard indoors or in certain parts of the city during its weekly test.

“Since Oct. 18, we have been unable to hear the siren and its message during the Wednesday test,” said Laura Smith, executive director of Empower Youth Network. “This affects our confidence in our ability to evacuate staff and the youth we serve during a real emergency.”

Sabrina Register, a spokesperson for Seattle Public Utilities, said the new alert system is the same functionally as the old system, but with modern updates and more reliable components. They plan to keep tweaking the system, she said.

“Based on feedback from residents on the new warning system, we continue to make improvements to the system’s sound volume and quality, including upgrading all speakers, speaker amplifiers and re-recording voice messages,” she wrote in an email. “We are working to complete these additional improvements as quickly as possible. We expect all three items to be completed by January 2024.”

The siren upgrade includes a second phase that will expand the abilities of the current alert system, including additional indoor sirens and more signage. SPU expects to complete the second phase by the end of 2024, Register said. SPU also continues to provide 24/7 surveillance and monitoring of the dam and undergoes daily inspections, she said.

A spokesperson for Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell did not return a message seeking comment.

Carnation officials emphasized Nov. 15 that they bear the brunt of a dam they received no benefits from. SPU uses the dam as a reservoir, supplying water to Seattle while also selling it to other municipalities. Carnation, who has a separate water supply, says the city has not received any financial benefit from the dam or Seattle, but has spent city dollars on emergency preparedness and mitigation efforts to prepare for a potential breach.

City Manager Ana Cortez said the city would begin submitting invoices to the city of Seattle for expenses they incur as a result of the dam. She also said the city would like to negotiate an interlocal agreement, noting a partnership has not existed in the dam’s 62-year existence.

“This is not us asking for donations,” she said. “We are asking them to do what’s right.”