

August 13, 2025

Seattle Public Utilities

Attn: Tolt Dam Early Warning System Project Team

Subject: Comments on Third-Party Assessment of the Tolt Dam Early Warning System

Dear Seattle Public Utilities,

The City of Carnation appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the third-party assessment of the Tolt Dam Early Warning System. While we support efforts to improve public safety and emergency preparedness, we have serious concerns regarding the scope and findings of the current assessment.

1. Critical Gaps in Alert Accessibility

The assessment does not adequately account for the unique communication challenges faced by our community:

- **Lack of Cellular Infrastructure:** Carnation has no local cell tower, severely limiting the reach and reliability of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), King County alerts, and reverse 911 systems. This infrastructure gap undermines the effectiveness of digital alert systems.
- **Recreational Users:** Visitors along the Snoqualmie and Tolt Rivers—including hikers, kayakers, and anglers—often do not carry cell phones or may be outside of service range. These individuals are especially vulnerable in the event of dam failure.
- **Youth Camps:** Camp River Ranch (Girl Scouts), Camp Don Bosco, and Camp Gilead among others host hundreds of children and staff each summer. These camps often enforce policies that restrict or prohibit cell phone use, making digital alerts ineffective.
- **Local Schools:** Carnation Elementary and Tolt Middle School have cell phone protocols that may prevent students from receiving emergency alerts in real time. Relying solely on digital alerts does not ensure timely communication with school populations.

- **Tourists and Seasonal Visitors:** Carnation regularly welcomes 2,000–8,000 visitors per day during peak seasons. Many are unfamiliar with local emergency protocols or unaware of the risks associated with Tolt Dam. The current assessment does not address how these individuals would be warned in an emergency.
- **Senior Population:** Carnation has the largest senior population in the Snoqualmie Valley. Many seniors live independently or in rural areas and may not use smartphones or be able to respond quickly to digital alerts.
- **Residents with Limited English Proficiency or Disabilities:** These individuals may require alternative communication methods to receive timely and actionable alerts. The assessment does not address inclusive strategies for reaching these populations.

2. Deviation from Original Scope

The third-party assessment was intended to evaluate the reliability and effectiveness of the early warning siren system and make recommendations on a path forward. However, the report expands well beyond its scope. For example, the report suggests that Carnation may bear responsibility for the maintenance and management of the siren system, which is inconceivable. City of Carnation does not have the technical expertise, financial resources or staffing to manage the siren system. The overreach of the assessment distracts from the urgent need to restore a reliable audible warning system.

3. Need for a Clear Path Forward

The siren system has been inactive since March 2024, leaving Carnation without a critical layer of emergency communication. The assessment does not provide a clear timeline or actionable recommendations for restoring a reliable siren system. This delay continues to place our residents and visitors at risk.

4. Accountability

The assessment doesn't adequately address past failures of the siren system and accountability for the residents of Carnation.

5. Evacuation

The report contends that there is “substantial” time to evacuate. This statement is erroneous for several reasons including the fact that there is no comprehensive evacuation study which says how long it would take to evacuate Carnation. How can the report assert there is substantial time when there is no concrete data to support the time it takes to evacuate residents, workers, school-children, educators and visitors?

Thank you for your attention to these concerns. The City of Carnation remains committed to working collaboratively with Seattle Public Utilities to ensure the safety of all who live in and visit our community.

X Adair Hawkins
Adair Hawkins (Aug 13, 2025 11:07:05 PDT)

Adair Hawkins
Mayor

X Jim Ribail
Jim Ribail (Aug 13, 2025 10:31:31 PDT)

Jim Ribail
Deputy Mayor

X Ryan Burrell
Ryan Burrell (Aug 13, 2025 12:42:00 PDT)

Ryan Burrell
Councilmember

X Jessica Merizan

Jessica Merizan
Councilmember