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## City Council gets defibrillator demonstration Supervisor says \$1,500 talking machines designed to restart hearts, prevent brain damage

By John Geluardi  
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If you or a loved one suddenly experience cardiac arrest, life-saving help may be hanging on the nearest wall.

Compact talking devices known as automatic external defibrillators have been installed in libraries, senior centers and colleges throughout Contra Costa County.

At Tuesday's Richmond City Council meeting, Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia and two American Medical Response paramedics demonstrated how to use them.

The defibrillators are designed to provide immediate emergency treatment to people who have suffered a heart attack and are awaiting the arrival of paramedics.

The average response time for medical emergencies in Contra Costa County is seven to 10 minutes. A heart attack victim's chance of survival decreases by 10 percent with each minute that passes without treatment, according to Contra Costa Health Services.

Gioia, who spearheaded the public access defibrillator program, said there are currently 65 of the \$1,500 units deployed around the county, including 13 in West Contra Costa. He said 25 more will be added to other public locations during the coming year.

"We're also working to get private businesses like Target and Costco to purchase these defibrillators," Gioia said. "The cost is nothing for large companies like those and they have large numbers of the public in their stores."

The defibrillators are designed to be easy enough for a child to use.

After the unit is taken from the wall and a tab on it is pulled, its audible instructions walk the user through the process. Once the pads are in place on the patient's chest, the unit warns the operator to stand back before it delivers an electrical charge to restart the heart, which regulates the flow of oxygen to the brain and extremities.

"The sooner they are used, the greater the chances for the patient's survival," Gioia said.

Sudden cardiac arrest kills 460,000 people a year in the United States.

Those who survive often suffer brain damage.

Gioia said the defibrillator program has personal meaning to him because his father had a heart attack near his home in 1987. He was deprived of oxygen during the eight minutes it took for paramedics to arrive.

By the time he was resuscitated, he had suffered severe brain damage and died 10 days later.

"If there had been a defibrillator there, he would not have suffered the same degree of damage," Gioia said.

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### INFORMATION

To learn more about the defibrillator program, call 925-646-4690 or visit [www.cchealth.org/groups/ems/pad.php](http://www.cchealth.org/groups/ems/pad.php).