A Guide to the FCC's Public Alert and Warning Systems

ITU-D Q5/2

Early Warning Systems Panel

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Geneva, Switzerland

Major Alerting Systems

Emergency Alert System (EAS)

- Alerts delivered to the public by Broadcast Radio and Television, Cable Television, Direct Broadcast Satellite, Sirius/XM (EAS Participants)

- EAS Participants must deliver a Presidential alert (has never been used); delivery of all other alerts (Weather, Child Abduction, etc.) is voluntary

- Government alert initiators deliver alerts to EAS Participants over broadcast or over the Integrated Public and Warning System (IPAWS), a secure Internet-based system administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency

- IPAWS distributes alerts using the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), an international standard that allows alerts containing rich data to be delivered to multiple platforms

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)

- Geographically-targeted text alerts to WEA-capable mobile devices.

- WEA alerts can be received by all WEA-capable handsets within the area, even those from other states

- Voluntary participation by wireless carriers (the vast majority participate)

- Limited to Presidential, Imminent Threat (i.e., tornado) and Child Abduction Alerts

- Government alert initiators deliver WEA Alerts to wireless providers over IPAWS.

Current Issues - WEA

- **Improving Alert Message content**
  - Inclusion of "clickable" links (*i.e.*, URLs and phone numbers) in alerts – required by November 2017
  - Increasing maximum Alert Message length from 90 to 360 characters – Required by May 2019
  - Support the transmission of Spanish-language alerts – Required by May 2019

- **Improving Alert Message delivery**
  - Reduce over-alerting by requiring WEA alerts to be delivered to the geographic area that best approximates the area specified by the alert originator – Required now
    - By November 2019, the alert must match the area specified by the alert originator.
  - Ensure timely warning by requiring WEA-capable mobile devices to process and display alerts as they are received, even if the customer is on a call or data session

- **Allowing emergency managers to test, exercise, and raise public awareness about WEA**
  - Permits state/local WEA testing as community-based proficiency training exercises
  - Permits entities to issue Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that use the WEA attention signal

- **Other issues**
  - How can multimedia and multilingual capabilities of WEA be improved?
  - What methods can improve consumer choice about WEA?

Current Issues - EAS

- **State EAS Plans**
  - Current filings are on paper – Plans will be required to be brought online

- **EAS Testing and Outreach**
  - Should Live Code Alerting Exercises and Public Service Announcements using live event codes be permitted?

- **Expansion of EAS**
  - What are consumer expectations regarding alerts over new video services?
  - Social Media
    - How is it used as an alerting mechanism?
    - Can it be a valuable adjunct to effective alerting?
  - How can CAP and rich media be used in the EAS as the US transitions to the new ATSC 3.0 broadcast standard?

- **EAS Nationwide Testing**
  - Nationwide test conducted in 2011, 2016, and 2017.
  - Goal is to ensure that the EAS remains an effective way of warning Americans of emergencies
  - Assesses the improvements to EAS—particularly regarding accessibility—that were implemented to address the challenges identified following the 2011 nationwide test
  - Reporting – EAS Test Reporting System (ETRS)
    - Web-based reporting for 21,000+ broadcasters, cable providers and other EAS Participants