

IPAWS TIP

Integrated Public Alert and Warning System



TIP #24: COVID-19 When Can You Use IPAWS?

Deciding whether to issue a public alert or warning can be a difficult decision. Ultimately it is a matter of local judgment. IPAWS, and the associated delivery pathways, is a valuable tool that will allow you to serve those in your respective jurisdictions during an emergency.

Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic and distribution of public safety information, IPAWS, including WEA and EAS, may be used to:

- Convey Health Orders
- Detail Curfew information
- Notify of Assembly guidelines/restrictions
- Advise of other COVID-19 related information

With the updates to WEA you can now include a phone number and hyperlink as well as send 90 and 360-character messages in both English and Spanish. (This may vary among alert origination tools). And, as always, EAS provides the ability to send up to 2 minutes of information via text-to-speech or pre-recorded audio in English and Spanish.

In planning to use IPAWS, the IPAWS PMO encourages you to first send your message to the test environment at the IPAWS Lab. The IPAWS Lab provides a safe environment for you to familiarize yourself with your tool capabilities and the WEA enhancements. The IPAWS Message Viewer is a great method to verify your message will be disseminated and appear as you intended. Contact the IPAWS Lab at fema.ipaws.lab@awtestlab.com for any specific questions.

Additionally, The IPAWS PMO reminds you of the following best practices:

- The EAS relies on event codes and you should understand which events will be carried by your local broadcasters.

- In order for a WEA to be broadcast by wireless providers, the Urgency, Severity, and Certainty must adhere to the “top-two” rule of thumb.

Several jurisdictions have already sent messaging to their public. (See examples below)

90-character WEAs:

- *This is XXXX County Health Dept if you experience Coronavirus symptoms call 2-1-1*
- *Public Health Order in effect 10pm prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people*
- *New Health Order for XXXX County for COVID-19 - Stay Home-No Gatherings. <insert link here>*

360-character WEAs have been sent as well:

- *Effective at 10pm the XXXX County Public Health Director has issued a Public Health Order. This Order prohibits all large gatherings and events of more than 50 people. Gatherings of less than 50 attendees are also prohibited unless measures are taken by event organizers to minimize risk. For greater details visit: <insert link here>*
- *This is the XXXX County Health Department. COVID-19 information is evolving. We urge you to learn about the virus and what to do if you experience symptoms. Please call or visit: XX Coronavirus Hotline at 1-XXX-XXX-XXXX. United Way @ 2-1-1. Health Dept @ <insert link here> and Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov*

Example EAS message sent:

- *XXXX County has updated the current public health order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Effective 10pm tonight, all dine-in activity in all restaurants, bars and cafeterias in XXXX County is prohibited. Restaurants are permitted to provide delivery and take-out options. All retail business locations that are open to the general public will also be required to close effective 10 p.m tonight. Banks, grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, liquor stores, and marijuana dispensaries will remain open. Effective at midnight tonight, ride share services such as Uber and Lyft, will be suspended. XXXX public transit services will be suspended after the conclusion of scheduled service tonight. Buses will not resume service Tuesday morning until further notice. Effective at 12 noon on Thursday, March 19 all lodging businesses, including hotels, motels, timeshares and short term rentals (e.g., Airbnb, VRBO) are required to be closed. All airport shuttle services will also be discontinued by 12 noon on Thursday, March 19. All public safety orders are effective until further notice, when it is determined that this degree of social distancing is no longer required. The XXXX County Department of Human Services is providing support to community members who need assistance with food, medication or transportation. Anyone who needs help meeting basic needs should call XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX. For more information please tune into XXXX County TV or go to <insert link here>*

Please contact the IPAWS PMO at IPAWS@fema.dhs.gov with any questions.

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