



Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Fact Sheet

BACKGROUND

- When disasters strike, whether accidental or manmade, it has always been vital that they be reported accurately and in a timely fashion to those who may be in danger.
- In June 2006, the President signed the Public Alert and Warning System Executive Order which states, "It is the policy of the United States to have an effective, reliable, integrated, flexible, and comprehensive system to alert and warn the American people..."
- In response, FEMA established the IPAWS Program Management Office (PMO) as the solution for effective public alerts and warnings.

REACHING THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IN TODAY'S MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

- Current research shows that the reach of radio and TV is less than 40% of the populace during the work day. Also, fewer than 12% of the population is watching TV in the middle of the night and an even smaller number, 5%, of people are tuned into the radio.
- Today, the internet, including video and email, and cellular and residential phones are valuable, additional sources of information.
- IPAWS, as the next generation emergency alert and warning system, integrates multiple communication pathways to ensure the public receives life-saving information during an emergency.

HOW DOES IPAWS WORK?

- IPAWS allows alerting authorities to write an alert or warning for distribution using open standards.
- The message is then authenticated by the IPAWS Open Platform for Emergency Networks (OPEN) to be delivered simultaneously through multiple communications pathways reaching as many people as possible to save lives and protect property.
- IPAWS alerts and warnings are location specific and therefore more relevant to those receiving the alert.
- Through the use of open standards, IPAWS allows for growth and integration with future consumer technologies.

HOW DO ALERTING AUTHORITIES SEND A WARNING OVER IPAWS?

- IPAWS must ensure the President can reach the American people, but it recognizes that most alerts and warnings are issued at a State and local level.
- After completing FEMA-sponsored training, alerting authorities will be authenticated for access to IPAWS.
- They will then be able to use Common Alerting Protocol compliant emergency and incident management tools to create location-specific alerts that are scaled to cover areas as big as their entire jurisdiction or a much smaller area within their jurisdiction.
- Once created, the alert can then be sent to the IPAWS Open Platform for Emergency Networks, or IPAWS OPEN.

HOW IS AN ALERT ROUTED BY IPAWS OPEN?

- IPAWS OPEN authenticates the source and validates that the alert input conforms to the Common Alerting Protocol standard and IPAWS profile. This provides a standard for everyone across all levels of government as well as the private sector.
- While older systems relied on audio and text-only systems, IPAWS-OPEN makes picture and video feeds possible and allows for the seamless incorporation of emerging technologies.
- Once the alert message has been authenticated by IPAWS OPEN, the message is simultaneously delivered to all IPAWS-complaint public alerting systems.
- Emergency alerts will be delivered across multiple pathways including the Emergency Alert System (EAS) which uses AM, FM, and satellite radio as well as broadcast, cable, and satellite TV.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will deliver alerts through the National Weather Service all-hazards radio.
- Alerts will be available on the internet through web based applications such as email, instant messaging, and RSS feeds in any web browser.
- State, local, territorial, and tribal alerting systems such as emergency telephone networks, giant voice sirens, and digital road signs may also receive alerts from IPAWS-OPEN.
- Future alerting technologies and systems can be easily integrated into IPAWS.

COMMERCIAL MOBILE ALERT SYSTEM

- The Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) is a partnership between the FCC, FEMA, and Commercial Mobile Service Providers, and is designed to enhance public safety.
- CMAS allows government authorities to use the IPAWS-OPEN platform to send geographically targeted, text-like alerts to the public via their wireless handsets.
- Even if cellular networks are overloaded and no longer support person-to-person calls, text, and emails, CMAS will send alerts to cell phones and other commercial mobile network devices based on location.
- CMAS will relay Presidential, AMBER, and Imminent Threat alerts to cell phones in a geographically targeted affected area.
- The public does not need to sign up to receive CMAS alerts. Cell carriers will sell CMAS capable phones with the service already opted-in.
- Participating wireless carriers must begin deployment by April 2012. However, some carriers – AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon – will offer CMAS in certain areas ahead of schedule.
- Alerting Authorities will not be charged for CMAS messages they send.
- Individuals will not be charged for CMAS messages they receive.