

Integrated Public Alert and Warning System

Description of Program

The program management office of the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, or IPAWS, came about as a result of Executive Order 13407, which President Bush signed in June 2006 to create a more comprehensive and integrated national alert and warning system. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) sends messages by way of TV and radio and has served the nation well, but is based on technology that is over 15 years old. IPAWS expands upon the traditional EAS through the use of digital and other 21st century technology.

Benefits to Continuity

Through IPAWS, FEMA and its federal partners (FCC, NOAA, and DHS S&T) are transforming the alert system from an audio-only signal sent over radios and televisions to one that can support audio, video, text, and data alert messages sent to residential telephones, websites, pagers, email accounts, and cell phones, in addition to traditional broadcast media. The concept behind the IPAWS network of alert and warning systems is to use as many means possible to send one message over more channels to more people at all times and places in order to save more lives and property.

Recent Accomplishments

FEMA has conducted a number of pilots at the state level since the IPAWS Program Management Office was established in April 2007. During the 2007 hurricane season, FEMA piloted several new technologies in the Gulf Coast states of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The pilots demonstrated that new communications technologies at the state level, such as the Emergency Telephone Notification (ETN) capability or the capability to send emergency messages to email accounts or cell phones, could be integrated with the national alert and warning system infrastructure. The Gulf Coast pilots also showed that these new technologies could meet the alert and warning needs of residents who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Next Steps

In 2009-2010, FEMA will be: (a) adding more Primary Entry Point (PEP) stations for expansion of EAS coverage; (b) assuming the federal Gateway role for national cell phone alerts; (c) adopting a federal Common Alerting Protocol (CAP); and, (d) proving the concept of EAS restoration.

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