

FEMA Celebrates 10th Anniversary of Wireless Emergency Alerts on Integrated Public Alert and Warning System

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WASHINGTON -- FEMA is celebrating the 10th anniversary of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) on its Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS). WEA is a tool for authorized government agencies to reach the American public via cell phones during emergencies.

“In the past 10 years, FEMA has carried more than 70,000 messages from public safety authorities alerting people of threats posed by nearby extreme weather events, law enforcement incidents and many other hazards,” said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell. “In partnership with the Federal Communications Commission and your local public safety authorities, we are working to keep you safe and informed when seconds count.”

Alerts are created and sent by authorized federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government agencies through IPAWS to participating wireless providers, which deliver the alerts to compatible handsets in geo-targeted areas. To help ensure that these alerts are accessible to the entire public, including people with disabilities, the alerts are accompanied by a unique tone and vibration.

In 2007, FEMA began modernizing the nation’s public alert and warning system by integrating new technologies into the existing alert systems. The new system, IPAWS, became operational in 2011. The first WEA was sent on June 28, 2012 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for a flash flood warning in the Santa Fe, New Mexico area.

Today, IPAWS supports more than 1,700 federal, state, local, tribal and territorial users through a standardized message format. IPAWS enables public safety alerting authorities such as emergency managers, police and fire departments to send the same alert and warning message over multiple communication pathways at the same time to people in harm’s way, helping to save lives.



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“Since the launch of Wireless Emergency Alerts a decade ago, the system has become an indispensable tool for public safety officials to warn and inform their communities,” said Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel. “The FCC is now working to expand the use of this lifesaving service and increase confidence in its effectiveness through new measurements of WEA’s speed, accuracy and reliability, and first-ever WEA geotargeting testing in partnership with FEMA and state and local agencies.”



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