



Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) TIP #9: Can you Send a Successful Alert?

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Currently, only UTF-8 characters are accepted by the IPAWS system. Alerting authorities should avoid using non-UTF-8 characters, such as quotation marks and apostrophes.

What does that mean?

The IPAWS system does not understand curly or slanted punctuation marks such as apostrophes or quotation marks. A message crafted in Microsoft Word or Outlook containing an apostrophe, quotation mark, or other non-letter symbol pasted into your alerting software will produce unexpected results which may cause the message delivery to fail. Typically, messages manually typed into an alerting tool, or created with Notepad or Notepad ++, and then copied and pasted into the alert, will not cause these issues. An example of an acceptable apostrophe is straight up and down like this '. Microsoft Office uses the more aesthetically pleasing, but unacceptable, slanted apostrophe like this '. There is not much of a difference, but it can cause some confusion. The same issue applies to quotation marks, in addition to accents and tildes in Spanish. This can become very important when issuing AMBER alerts where a child or family name contains an apostrophe.

Summarizing:

- Sheriff ' s Office = Good
- Sheriff ' s Office = Fail
- 5 feet, 6 inches = Good
- 5 ' 6 " = Fail (for both 5 ' and 6 ")

To ensure a message does not contain these errors, alerting authorities can test alerts with the IPAWS Lab to ensure message accuracy, and that all characters are accepted. Alerting authorities can also create templates for possible emergency scenarios to ensure message consistency.

This is a type of issue that we hope to resolve by moving the IPAWS-Open Platform for Emergency Networks system to a cloud environment. If you need additional information or have any questions, please contact the FEMA IPAWS Program Management Office at IPAWS@fema.dhs.gov.

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