

Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Lab

FEMA's IPAWS Program Management Office provides public safety officials with a controlled IPAWS testing environment where alert and warning technologies can be exercised to assess capabilities and effectiveness with IPAWS.

Background

IPAWS Lab is a closed environment capable of demonstrating alert dissemination to all IPAWS pathways including the Emergency Alert System, Wireless Emergency Alerts, Non-Weather Emergency Messages, IPAWS All-Hazards Information Feed, and Collaborative Operating Groups. The primary purpose of the IPAWS Lab is for public safety officials to gain confidence using IPAWS in a safe and closed environment. The IPAWS Lab is also used for alert and warning functional assessment, alert dissemination validation, training, procedural and process evaluation, and establishing functional requirements.

Quotation from a State Communications Expert

"I saw firsthand how FEMA walked our agency through the alert origination process. They walked through how the message needed to look. They were able to show it over the IPAWS Lab equipment/software. I thought it was very helpful and innovative."

Quotation from an Assistant Coordinator of a major metropolitan area Alerting Authority

"Over the last year [our agency] has done vendor testing, IPAWS Lab testing and communicated regularly with FEMA at least once a week. [Our staff] is more accustomed to using it, and we will not hesitate in an emergency. Repetition and requiring all key staff to participate is valuable."

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About IPAWS Lab

What is the IPAWS Lab?

The IPAWS Lab is an offline version of IPAWS. The lab is a valuable resource to Alerting Authorities because it mimics live environment capabilities but is a closed/safe network to train, test and exercise.



FEMA

Available resources include:

- IPAWS Supported State/Regional Testing (ISSRT) Fact Sheet¹

How do I access the IPAWS lab?

There are three ways to [access the lab](#): on-site testing, off-site testing and independent testing².

Who uses the IPAWS Lab?

Alerting Authorities with an active Memorandum of Agreement with FEMA's IPAWS office.

What can my organization do in the IPAWS Lab?

- Understand IPAWS capabilities and functionalities;
- Create an IPAWS alert; and
- Validate alert dissemination.

What are the benefits of testing in the IPAWS Lab?

- Hands-on use or observation of software capabilities;
- Craft IPAWS messages;
- Validate IPAWS message dissemination;
- Troubleshoot, if necessary; and
- Ability to Q&A with FEMA staff.

How to Test with the IPAWS Lab

How do I test?

- In person (on-site);
- Virtual (webinar);

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency. "IPAWS Supported State/Regional Testing Fact Sheet." FEMA, 2020, <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/ipaws-supported-staterregional-testing-issrt>. Accessed 14 September 2020.

² Federal Emergency Management Agency. "Practice and Train with the IPAWS Lab." FEMA, 2020, <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public-safety-officials/ipaws-lab>. Accessed 13 August 2020.

- Independent Testing; and
- Utilize [Program Checklist](#)³.

How often should I test?

It is required to test once a month in the IPAWS Lab⁴.

Best practices from agencies can be found in the quotations below.

Quotation from a Mid-sized county Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

“We conduct our monthly test in the IPAWS Lab. We just started this test routinely in October. Before Christmas, we started having everyone [on staff] come on board to know how to operate the system. The testing is important because if you mess this up [in an emergency], you are actually sending the message. The downside is huge, and we consider it a ‘high consequence action.’ With our testing, we want to understand what obstacles exist and what needs to be changed.”

Quotation from an Assistant Coordinator of a major metropolitan area Alerting Authority

“[Test with the lab] once a week. We put this into our requirements to test four times a month, not just once a month. [We want to] do a test and know if it was successful [before an emergency].”

³ Federal Emergency Management Agency. “Testing with the IPAWS Lab - Checklist for Alerting Authorities.” FEMA, 2020, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-08/fema_testing-ipaws-lab_checklist-alerting-authorities_2020.pdf. Accessed 13 August 2020.

⁴ Federal Emergency Management Agency. “Alerting Authorities.” FEMA, 2020, <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public-safety-officials/alerting-authorities>. Accessed 13 August 2020.