

# TIP #31: Updating and Canceling Alerts

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Disasters and emergencies often change, therefore, you might need to update or cancel an alert. Canceling an alert stops continual re-broadcast of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) and removes the active alert from feeds. However, that cancellation won't be communicated to your public. Follow up with a new alert if you want to communicate any updates or corrections to a previous alert.

IPAWS-Open Platform for Emergency Networks (IPAWS-OPEN) provides Alerting Authorities the capability to cancel an alert, so cell towers no longer broadcast a WEA. Should an alert be sent in error Alerting Authorities may issue a subsequent corrective Emergency Alert System (EAS) and WEA alert advising the public to disregard the erroneous alert. The operational procedures for doing so are the Alerting Authority's responsibility.

Alerting Authorities do not need permission from FEMA or FCC to update or cancel an alert.

FEMA encourages Alerting Authorities to establish clear standard operating procedures for issuing alerts via IPAWS and to test and exercise regularly to address such eventualities for needing to send an alert. These procedures should specify that corrections to false alerts must be issued over the same systems used to issue the false alert, including the EAS and WEA, as well as other available means.

Procedures should also include actions for notifying the media, Public Information Officers, law enforcement and other officials with public order responsibilities about false or erroneous alerts.

The IPAWS Program Management Office (PMO) has no visibility into local emergencies and does not decide if an alert is accurate. The PMO does not monitor the public impact of each alert sent through IPAWS. If an alert is sent in error, an Alert Originator should follow their agency's policy on canceling a message or sending an "all clear" update.

Monitoring the status of a message enables you to confirm that the alert was disseminated, and the public received it. It also permits confirmation that the proper pathway was used. If the alert was errant or failed to go out successfully, you should check the error information, correct the issue, and resend. Different alerting software products may display errors differently.

## Monitoring the Alert:

- Confirm the message was sent successfully
- Continue to monitor the situation:
  - o For status or situation changes
  - o To determine whether the message is still valid
  - o To send a follow-up message when the situation is over
- Send updates, if needed
- Cancel the message, if the situation warrants termination



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## **Monitoring the Alert (cont.):**

If canceled, is further public explanation or instruction necessary? If you are simply cancelling a message, then updates may not be required.

## **Keep in Mind:**

Nonexistent or inadequate system training increases the potential for false or delayed alerts or cancellations and other errors. It is essential Alerting Authorities receive specific training and direction on their particular alert origination software from the software vendor on how to update and cancel IPAWS alerts. All alert origination software vendors may not have the update and cancel capabilities.

When sending an update, use the same event code as the original alert.

Members of the public may or may not receive alert updates. A mobile phone may receive a WEA but not a subsequent alert. For example, if the user has disabled alerts or moved out of range of the area designated in the alert, they will not receive the update.

Radio and TV stations and cable providers are not required to forward local and state alerts. Typically, EAS messages are played one time and then they are done. Forwarding to the public EAS updates or cancellations will likely not occur. Except for tests and national-level alerts, EAS participation is voluntary.

## **Contact Us**

If you would like the PMO to cover a specific topic in these IPAWS Tips, please share your ideas at [ipaws@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:ipaws@fema.dhs.gov).

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