

TIP #46: Embedded Web Links in Wireless Emergency Alerts

Changes to Twitter can affect links in Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA).

IPAWS is working with Twitter and other social media platforms to find a more permanent solution to the link issues described below. Access to lifesaving information for all community members remains the top priority at IPAWS.

*NOTE: At the time of this writing, Twitter was in the process of **rebranding to 'X'**.*

Background on Twitter and WEA

Embedded web links allow WEA recipients to view content not included in the alert: maps, photos of incidents, vehicles or missing persons; or simply to read text that could not fit in the 360-character limit of a WEA text field.

When links became available in WEA in 2018, some government sites couldn't handle the traffic of thousands of alert recipients visiting a link for additional information. The web servers of Alerting Authorities (AAs) would "crash" under heavy loads.

AAs found a workaround for this problem with Twitter. With its substantial internet infrastructure, Twitter could handle high visitor traffic. The company consented to this use as an alert link destination.

Later, AAs began including links to their full Twitter profile (account page) in WEAs, instead of linking to individual tweets. This practice promoted greater public trust in the information being presented, due to the source of the information and their familiarity with seeing a consistent link. It also reduced the chances of an input error by the alert originator.

Current Issue

AAs recently found that alert recipients can no longer easily access the AA's Twitter profile. The issue is due to a Twitter policy change. Links to profiles will ask the recipient to sign up or login, further delaying them taking action.

Temporary Solution

Twitter provided the following information:

"In order to minimize the degradation of our service and platform from unauthorized scraping of Twitter data, we have implemented measures to restrict access to profiles for logged-out users.

"However, individual tweets are still readable and available to logged-out users. We are investigating potential solutions to allow for edge public-safety use cases, but in the meantime, **linking to individual tweets is the viable option.**"

While this is not a permanent solution nor a best practice, it is currently the only way to use Twitter in a WEA and allow alert recipients access to the full content the AA wishes them to view.



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