

VENTURA COUNTY SHERIFF'S EMERGENCY SERVICES



OPERATIONAL AREA ALERT & WARNING PLAN



VENTURA COUNTY SHERIFF
Emergency Services

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Acknowledgements

This plan was prepared by Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services and was developed to ensure a consistent application of alert and warning practices, procedures, and protocols. It is critical that in the event of an emergency, every tool is used to alert and warn all members of the public in the affected area.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services ***State of California Alert & Warning Guidelines, March 2019*** was used in the development of this plan.

The recommendations, guidelines and protocols included in this plan are intended to improve emergency alert and warning and to satisfy the Standardized Emergency Management System requirements as presented in Title 19 of the California Code of Regulations and the National Incident Management System.

Foreword

Ventura County has experienced numerous major disasters that have reinforced the need for a comprehensive, coordinated, and robust alert and warning program. The Ventura County Sheriff Emergency Services Alert and Warning Program is a critical component used to communicate threats and hazards to the public before, during and after an emergency.

Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services serves as the Ventura County Operational Area Alert and Warning Program coordinator. In this capacity, Sheriff Emergency Services recognizes the need to provide timely, actionable, specific, and instructional information to the public during an emergency. The Ventura County Operational Area Alert and Warning Plan is an annex to the Ventura County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and will provide a detailed overview of the notification systems that are in use, including administration, agency roles and responsibilities, maintenance, and training.

Intended Audience

The intended audience for this document are the agencies and jurisdictions within the Ventura County Operational Area that have a role in ensuring the public is notified effectively before, during, and after emergencies of what protective actions need to be taken.

Purpose

This plan establishes general and specific policies, procedures, and protocols for the use of Alert and Warning systems in the Ventura County Operational Area (OA) during actual or potential emergencies that pose a significant threat to life or property. This plan serves as a functional annex to the Ventura County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

Timely and effective alerts and warnings are critical to the life safety of Ventura County residents, visitors, and first responders. Residents and visitors must be informed of threats and directed to take appropriate action as quickly and as accurately as possible. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define authorities, responsibilities, and procedures. The words "alert" and "warning" often are used interchangeably, but in this document shall refer to the following:

Alert - A communication intended to draw the attention of recipients to a potentially hazardous condition or event.

Warning - A communication that encourages recipients to take immediate protective actions appropriate to an emergent hazard or threat.

Alert and Warning Objectives

The four key objectives of the Ventura County Alert & Warning Program are:

1. Proactively warn the public of threats by providing timely, targeted, accurate, and actionable information.
2. Use multiple, redundant, and overlapping alerting systems to ensure the best possible dissemination of alerts and warnings.
3. Incorporate social equity measures and ensure the ability to reach individuals with Access and Functional Needs (AFN), including those who are non-English speaking by identifying potential barriers and implementing mitigation strategies as required.
4. Coordinate and assist with the delivery of alerts and warnings across jurisdictional boundaries to assure continuity of messaging.

Background on Alert & Warning Program

Alert and Warning is a critical function of Emergency Management. The ability to communicate with the general public is essential to the preservation of life and property. Currently, the field of Alert and Warning is in a state of rapid and significant evolution. Traditional methods of communication such as landline telephones, broadcast television and radio are in decline as U.S. residents shift to wireless broadband, social media, and online platforms for communications and news.

Alert and Warning technology has been transformed in the last 10 years in both capability and complexity:

- The widespread adoption of mobile devices and supporting data networks has produced a radical increase in individual connectivity.
- The increased use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) enables the rapid identification and analysis of specific geographic locations. Specialized GIS hazard assessment models provide rapid forecasts of potential effects.
- The development of competing commercial software systems has produced a new service line which can rapidly deliver multimodal messages to a variety of personal devices and systems (text, cell phone, cable/internet, etc.).
- Wireless alert and warning systems now hold the promise of enabling alert activators to more accurately define target geographic areas.

Public expectations for local government alert and warning services have often escalated significantly beyond current industry practices:

- **Time:** Community members may expect alert and warning messages to be delivered within minutes of a no-notice event and hours in advance of a slowly developing event.
- **Custom delivery:** Community members have an expectation that even if they are not enrolled in a local system, that the government will locate them and deliver warning messages to the device/system at hand and in a form/language that is understandable to the recipient.
- **Detailed situational awareness:** Community members often assume that first responders fully understand the nature, scope, and severity of an unfolding incident and that this information will be immediately conveyed to them.
- **Specific instructions:** The capacity for systems to deliver detailed information and graphic content leads community members expect instructions customized to their specific circumstance on what action to take, which evacuation routes are recommended, and where additional resources are available.
- **Additional information:** Community members expect to be able to corroborate the warning message with other sources and obtain additional details (e.g. a phone number to call or an immediately available website).

However, there are significant social and technical challenges to the effective use of alert and warning system including:

- Economic disparity can limit communication. For example, seniors, migrant workers, immigrants, renters, and persons living below the poverty line are likely to have given up landlines but not adopted more expensive cell phones capable of receiving wireless alerts. Those experiencing homelessness may be unreachable through any telecommunications system and may be actively avoiding contact with local authorities, making in-person contact difficult.
- Another key issue is the uneven availability of communications systems such as the landline/cable internet and wireless broadband. While many individuals have access to the Internet, many do not – and these are often residents living in economically disadvantaged or geographically remote areas. Many warning systems may not be able to reach them. Recent disasters continue to show that people who experience marginalization because of inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic services are also disproportionately impacted.
- Geography and terrain can be significant barriers. In many rural parts of the Op Area, wireless broadband/cell service is spotty or completely unavailable. Landline telephone and cable systems are prone to failure due to loss of power or line damage and availability may be limited. Radio signals are also impacted by mountain ranges and deep valleys.

Government Roles & Responsibilities

Local Government

It is the role of city and county public safety officials to keep the public informed during natural and human-caused disasters in addition to sharing what actions they need to take to protect themselves and their families.

Local government officials often have the most accurate and timely understanding of the situation, necessary protective actions, and potential adverse impacts of the incident.

Information provided may include, but is not limited to:

- Evacuation orders (Including evacuation type: Warning, Order or Shelter-in-Place)
- Evacuation locations
- Shelter-in-place guidance
- Boil Water Orders
- Locations of points of distribution (for food, water, medicine, etc.).
- Law enforcement incidents (Suspect(s)-At-Large, Barricaded Subject(s), at Risk Missing Persons, etc.)

Local government officials are responsible for:

- Enactment of ordinances and/or policies identifying local roles and responsibilities to enable the issuance and coordinated dissemination of alerts and warnings to the public regarding imminent threats to human life and health and extraordinary threats to property.
- Installation, maintenance, user training and exercise/testing of local public alert and warning capabilities within their jurisdiction; Understanding the access and functional needs-related considerations associated with public alert and warning systems and messaging.
- Obtaining authority and tools for accessing federal warning systems as a Collaborative Operating Group (COG) via the FEMA Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)
- Participating in revisions of mandated Federal Communications Commission (FCC) local Emergency Alert System (EAS) plans, including approval of authorized event codes.
- Development of procedures for proper chain of command for initiating, cancelling, and revoking accidental alerts, and for rapidly correcting and updating alert details as additional information becomes available.
- Coordination with adjoining jurisdictions, Operational Areas, the State, and the National Weather Service regarding origination of alerts and warnings over NWS Weather Radio related to hazards that have effects across jurisdictional boundaries.

- Developing, maintaining, and submitting to the State EAS Committee a Local EAS Plan.

Within the Standard Emergency Management System (SEMS), the Ventura County Operational Area may coordinate response and recovery support to county sub-jurisdictions, e.g., cities and special districts. This includes coordination of emergency alerts, within the authority of the Local EAS Plan. Specifically, Operational Areas are responsible for:

- Coordinating with all Alerting Authorities within an Operational Area to effectively manage an incident and prepare and warn the public.
- Coordinating training, testing, and exercising of county-wide alerting and warning systems.
- Incorporating alert and warning systems into Operational Area standard procedures and protocols.
- Utilizing IPAWS as a component of the county-wide alert and warning plan.

State Government

Recognizing that virtually all disasters emerge on a local level, the main public alert and warning responsibility of the state is to provide training, consultation, and guidance on alert and warning standards and best practices to local government. This includes establishing access to and utilizing available urgent communications tools, such as the federal IPAWS network. The state will work with Operational Areas to support their mass notification efforts, and, when requested, serve as a back-up capability for the Operational Area. The state may need to issue public alerts under its own authority when an incident's severity and breadth of impact threatens multiple operational areas. When the State issues an alert or warning, every effort will be made to coordinate with the impacted Operational Area(s) prior to issuing the notification.

The State of California, acting through California Highway Patrol, is responsible for:

- Distributing public alerts regarding the well-being of at-risk children (AMBER Alerts), elders (SILVER Alerts), and officer safety (Blue Alerts) to law enforcement, broadcasters, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Lottery, ports of entry, and members of the public.

The State of California, acting through Cal OES, is responsible for the following as it relates to alert and warning:

- Relaying war emergency and other emergency alerts and notifications from state or federal authorities to appropriate offices and Operational Areas within the state.
- Issuing public alerts and warnings for all hazards when an incident's severity and breadth of impact threatens multiple jurisdictions.
- Coordination with adjoining jurisdictions, Operational Areas, the state, and NWS regarding origination of alerts and warnings related to hazards that have effects across jurisdictional boundaries or over NWS Weather Radio.

- Managing the California State Warning Center (CSWC) and the California Warning System (CALWAS), which is a state-sub circuit of the federal National Alert and Warning System (NAWAS) linking the State Warning Center and State Alternate Warning Center with Operational Area warning points.
- Assisting in coordination and when necessary/appropriate, issuing of public warning and alerting activities that affect multiple Operational Areas.
- Ensuring that state laws and regulations facilitate the efficient maintenance, testing, and use of public alert systems at all levels of state and local government.
- Publicizing standards of practice for effective and consistent statewide public alert and warning maintenance and execution.
- Providing standard, baseline alert and warning training to alerting authorities and originators.
- Direction and management of Earthquake Early Warning within the state
- Providing technical and programmatic guidance to cities, special districts, Operational Areas, 9-1-1 centers and other state agencies regarding the implementation and use of public alert and warning.
- Participating on the California EAS Plan Committee, which includes maintaining copies of local EAS plans.

Federal Government

FEMA is the lead federal agency for coordination and implementation of IPAWS. FEMA ensures that this nationwide system is maintained and operational. FEMA's stated goals for IPAWS are to:

- Operate NAWAS to notify state warning points and other critical operations centers of a wide variety of events including military attacks. NAWAS is controlled from FEMA's Operations Center and the FEMA Alternate Operations Center in the National Capital Region.
- Build and maintain an effective, reliable, integrated, flexible, and comprehensive alert and warning system.
- Diversify and modernize the broadcast EAS.
- Issue an IPAWS MOU and IPAWS certificate with the Collaborative Operating Group (COG) jurisdictions, acknowledging the approved event codes, and designated alerting authorities, ensuring required certificated training has been completed.
- Enable alert and warning to those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, including those without an understanding of the English language.
- Partner with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for seamless integration of message transmission through NWS national networks.
- Facilitate dissemination of Presidential Alerts during a national emergency.
- Receive and authenticate alert messages, then simultaneously deliver to all IPAWS-compliant public alerting systems.

- Ensure that required Emergency Management Institute (EMI) courses are available and updated periodically.

Alert & Warning Authority

Division 5, Chapter 3, Article 1, Section 5323 of the Ventura County Ordinance Code identifies the Ventura County Sheriff as the Director of Emergency Services. The Ventura County Sheriff is provided certain powers and duties (5323-1.3) to control and direct the effort of the emergency organization and (5323-1.4) to direct cooperation between and coordination of services and staff of the emergency organization of this County; and resolve questions of authority and responsibility that may arise between them. Furthermore, (5323-4) the Sheriff delegates the day-to-day administration of emergency management functions to the Director of Sheriff's Emergency Services to develop emergency plans and manage the emergency programs for the Ventura County Operational Area; and shall have such other powers and duties as may be assigned by the Director to include the alert and warning program.

An Alert Authority is a public official that is granted the authority to alert the public of emergency situations through Federal, State, and local laws. This authority is vested in any Incident Commander, Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Director, or to Sheriff's Emergency Services personnel. For alerts and warnings that cross jurisdictional boundaries within the Op Area, Alerting Authority is limited to personnel from Sheriff's Emergency Services.

No agency within the Op Area shall have the authority to intentionally issue an alert beyond Ventura County unless otherwise requested. However, as a design component of the system, the Emergency Alert System and Wireless Emergency Alerts may broadcast into multiple Operational Areas. This does not preclude an Alerting Authority from broadcasting alerts, but Alert Originators must clearly identify in the message their intent to alert only in their Op Area to prevent confusion.

Local Alert & Warning Technologies

Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services maintains and utilizes multiple alert and warning technology systems. Each provides different capabilities and limitations.

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)

The WEA system can send a brief text message along with a unique tone to all operating WEA-enabled mobile devices in a specified area. In recent years, FEMA implemented WEA 2.0 enhancements that expanded alerts to 360 characters for newer model mobile devices (90-character WEA messages are still required) and added Spanish language fields.

- To ensure the majority of WEA recipients receive the alert message in both English and Spanish, regardless of their device's language settings, the County utilizes the 360-character WEA fields to send bilingual alerts. The English and Spanish messages are combined and entered together into both 360-character WEA fields.
- Older model mobile devices may receive a 90-character WEA only in English or Spanish based on their device's language settings.
- Due to various factors, including the size of the geo-fence and the configuration, position and number of cell towers in the area, WEA messages may reach recipients well outside of the targeted geographical area, and sometimes miss some within the targeted area.

However, WEA operates with the following limitations:

- Not all wireless carriers distribute WEA messages the same way. Field testing and observation reveals that some carriers will not transmit messages unless their towers are within the designated alerting area.
- Wireless towers are vulnerable to disasters and power shutoffs and may not work.
- Device users may have disabled their alert capabilities, turned off audible notifications or may ignore incoming messages.
- Depending on the wireless carrier and/or the individual smart device, WEA may not be capable of sending full length messages or in Spanish.

Emergency Alert System (EAS)

The EAS is a national public warning system that requires broadcasters, cable television systems, wireless cable systems, satellite digital audio radio service (SDARS) providers, and direct broadcast satellite (DBS) providers to provide the communications capability for the President to address the American public during a national emergency (Presidential Alerts). The system also may be used by state and local authorities to deliver important emergency information, such as AMBER alerts, SILVER Alerts, and weather information targeted to specific areas.

Ventura County Sheriff Emergency Services is the administrator of IPAWS for the County and is authorized by FEMA to utilize the IPAWS WEA and EAS channels to send alerts. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Ventura County Sheriff's Office and FEMA authorizing the use of IPAWS was last updated in January of 2023 and is in effect for a maximum of three (3) years after the date of the last signature. All relevant personnel changes and changes to contact information must be provided to FEMA within 5 business days of the change.

Other jurisdictions and agencies who want to send WEA or EAS alerts within the Ventura County Operational Area are not covered under the County's MOA with FEMA and must obtain direct authorization from FEMA to utilize IPAWS notification channels or request the assistance from the County to send WEA and EAS notifications to the public on their behalf. Cal OES will review all requests in consultation with Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services. Uses of IPAWS within the OA must be closely coordinated with Ventura County Sheriff Emergency Services to avoid conflicting messages and even system failures.

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) is the only agency currently authorized to send WEAs for children and mentally/physically disabled persons that have been abducted (i.e., AMBER Alerts). Local law enforcement agencies are responsible for requesting these alerts from CHP. However, the Ventura County Sheriff's Office may issue WEAs for at-risk missing children and disabled adults.

Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services and the National Weather Service (NWS) are the only agencies currently authorized to send EAS alerts for weather and non-weather emergency notifications in Ventura County. Local agencies are to seek assistance from the Sheriff's Emergency Services Duty Officer if an EAS alert is needed.

The County can disseminate WEA and EAS messages using Everbridge or the rack-mount EAS encoder device installed within the Sheriff dispatch server room. Ventura County has been assigned a FIPS (Federal Information Processing Standard) location code 006111 used by IPAWS to recognize geographic warning areas.

Per the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 47, Part 11, Subpart D, Section 11.55, EAS may be activated at the State and Local Area levels by EAS participants at their discretion for day-to-day emergency situations posing a threat to life and property. The Ventura County Local Emergency Alert System (EAS) Plan is governed by this regulation and the

rules of the FCC. This plan outlines procedures for TV and radio broadcasters in Santa Barbara County on how to voluntarily rebroadcast EAS messages originated by NWS and Emergency Services. The plan is managed by the Local Emergency Communications Committee (LECC) comprised of members from radio, television and government sectors and must be updated every two (2) years or as needed to reflect major changes or lessons learned following an activation.

VCEmergency.com - Incident Information Website

VCEmergency.com is a public website operated by Ventura County Sheriff’s Emergency Services that is dedicated to disseminating emergency information to the public and the media via the internet. During an emergency, the VCEmergency website is the central location for public safety officials to provide real-time emergency information in English and Spanish. Information may include situation status reports, weather forecasts, evacuation orders and warnings, road closures and incident maps.

Social Media Platforms

Social media has become a critical component to disseminating preparedness messaging, hazard awareness, and emergency information to both the media and the public. The County consistently utilizes several accounts and platforms – including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram – to echo emergency alerts and help amplify information quickly and broadly throughout the county.

Agency	Social Media Handle
Ventura County Sheriff	Twitter: @VENTURASHERIFF Instagram: @vcsheriff
County of Ventura	Twitter: @CountyVentura Instagram: @countyofventura
Ventura County Fire Department	Twitter: @VCFD Instagram: @venturacountyfire
Public Health Department	Twitter: @VCPUBLICHEALTH

VC Alert Emergency Notification System

The VC Alert emergency notification system is a locally operated emergency notification system that can be used to send audible messages to landline telephones, cellular telephones, TTY/TTD devices, as well as textual messages to email address and cellular telephones.

In the event of an emergency, the VC Alert system is accessible from any location that can access the internet. Geospatial Information System (GIS) technology integrates the emergency notification engine with geo-coded contact data (that can be uploaded from customer databases and/or local telephone companies) and intelligent street centerline data. This allows for precise message delivery to a specific geographic region. Upon sending a message, the VC Alert system provides an active confirmation of message receipt following successful delivery. In addition to notifying communities, the VC Alert system can be used to mobilize first responders by using preconfigured internal notification lists.

Contact Information Sources and Confidentiality

The VC Alert organization in Everbridge houses community member contact information, referred to as “**Confidential Information**”, that is aggregated from multiple sources:

- **VC Alert Citizen Opt-in:** Once an account is established, subscribers can enter their notification method preferences, including text message, phone call, email, and TTY/TDD, that can be associated with up to five (5) locations within the county. Subscribers must provide at least one notification method and one physical address to be alerted.
- **Local White and Yellow Pages** resident and business telephone numbers.
- **911 Emergency Service Listing (ESL)** data that includes listed and unlisted landline records for Frontier Communications and AT&T customers.
- **Everbridge’s Resident Connection** database of verified mobile, landline and Voice over Internet (VoIP) telephone records from multiple sources, including telecommunication companies.

Most of the contact information accessible to the County is listed and unlisted landline phone numbers obtained from the “E911” database, White and Yellow Pages, and the Resident Connection database. In order to receive emergency alerts through mobile phone calls, text messages, and emails, community members must register their contact information at VCAAlert.org.

All contact information within Everbridge is considered Confidential Information and protected against unauthorized use and access. In compliance with California Public Utilities Code Sections 2872 and 2891.1, Confidential Information and use of the ENS can only be accessed for events or information directly related to public safety only. Authorized alerting agencies may not access Confidential Information or use the ENS for

purposes that could be considered "telemarketing", "community news", "political announcements", or for other non-emergency functions. Additionally, Confidential Information in the ENS may not be examined for investigative purposes in order to identify individual citizens or their contact information except for the purposes of analysis in order to determine if the system is functioning properly.

Personnel authorized to utilize the ENS system will take all reasonably feasible precautions to protect Confidential Information, safeguard and periodically update user passwords, and prevent any unauthorized use of the system. Authorized users are prohibited from saving ENS system passwords to their browser. Personnel are prohibited from accessing Confidential Information for personal reasons outside of professional responsibilities, such as information on friends and family, or searching for information on celebrities and other public figures. Unauthorized access, use, or modification of Confidential Information, or in transit to/from the ENS, may constitute a violation of civil and criminal laws. Anyone who accesses the ENS without authorization or exceeds access authority, or obtains, alters, damages, destroys, or discloses information, or prevents authorized use of information on the information system, may be subject to penalties, fines, or imprisonment.

The ENS, its information, and any related equipment is subject to monitoring for administrative oversight, law enforcement, criminal investigative purposes, inquiries into alleged wrongdoing or misuse, and to ensure proper performance of applicable security features and procedures.

Emergency Notification System - Appropriate Use

Authorized alerting agencies are responsible for ensuring the alert and warning systems are utilized appropriately in accordance with federal, state, and local policies, guidelines and regulations. Generally, appropriate use of emergency alerting systems generally falls within two (2) categories:

- 1) The need to disseminate **critical, time-sensitive public health and safety information and protective actions** for potential, imminent, and in-progress incidents, as well as follow-up, corrective, cancellation, and disaster recovery notifications.
- 2) Communicating with **emergency response employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders regarding an emergency**, including notifications to report for duty as a disaster service worker.

On occasion, agencies may receive requests to activate alert systems for situations that do not rise to the level of an emergency or can be managed more quickly and effectively by other notification means. For example, door-to-door notifications can be more efficient during emergencies that impact a very small number of community members. Certain emergencies with advance warning may be adequately managed through traditional media

sources, social media and press conferences.

When considering if a request constitutes an appropriate use of the emergency alerting systems, determine if the situation meets the following criteria:

- **Severity.** Is there a significant threat to life and property?
- **Public protection.** Is there a need for community members to take protective action in order to reduce loss of life or substantial loss of property?
- **Timing.** Does the situation require immediate public knowledge in order to avoid adverse impacts?
- **Alternate methods.** Are other means of disseminating the information inadequate to ensure proper and timely delivery of the information and protective action?

Non-County Alert & Warning Systems

National Weather Service Alerts

NWS has primary responsibility for originating public warnings relating to weather hazards. The NWS operates several public alert and warning dissemination systems, including NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards (NWR), a network of over 1,000 VHF radio transmitters serving the population of the United States, NOAA Weather Wire Service (NWWS), and the Emergency Managers Weather Information Network (EMWIN).

In addition, the NWS National Tsunami Warning Center issues Tsunami statements, watches, and warnings which are disseminated by the Coastal CA NWS offices. While the NWS has responsibility for weather-related alerts, local government is not precluded from sending notifications and alerts in support of weather events.

Frequently used by the National Weather Service (NWS) and broadcast over most of the Op Area, a NWR alert is capable of sending an alarm and very limited information to radios tuned to the NOAA radio frequency at 162.475. System limitations include:

- Requires having a working NWR device and set to the correct channel.
- Single point of failure with only one radio transmitter servicing most of the Op Area and currently without redundant capability.
- Many areas throughout the Op Area are situated in radio “shadows”, that are unable to receive alerts.
- Radio back-up battery systems have short duration in the event of a power failure.
- Op Area does not have independent alerting authority and activation requests may be denied by the NWS.

United Water Lake Piru Dam Failure Siren

Ventura County Sheriff Emergency Services, in partnership with United Water Conservation District, operates the Piru Siren System for the community and surrounding area of Piru. This system is another layer of emergency notification in the event of a Santa Felicia Dam failure. The system consists of two units; one mounted on the roof of Ventura County Fire Protection District (VCFPD) Station 28 and the other in the United Water Conservation District's spreading grounds to the east of the community of Piru.

The siren is tested on the first Friday of every month and sounds for approximately 15 minutes. Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services and United Water alternate in testing the system. United Water is tasked with ongoing maintenance for both sirens.

Other Alerting Methods

Hi-Low Siren / Public Address Systems

Several Ventura County Law Enforcement agencies have adopted the use of the Hi-Lo siren for alerting residents of the need to evacuate. Hi-Lo audible sirens are mounted on select law enforcement and other emergency vehicles. Their unique tone (similar to a European ambulance) is designed to warn local residents to evacuate. System limitations include:

- Little information can be conveyed other than there is some sort of emergency. Residents may experience reluctance to act on a Hi-Lo siren and will seek additional information, possibly clogging the 911 system.
- The effective audible range may be limited by rugged terrain, heavy vegetation, densely built areas, or how much sound can be heard inside a building.
- Law Enforcement and other emergency responder resources will be at a premium during disasters. Each vehicle can cover only limited ground and the ability to accomplish even moderate-level alerting will be challenging.

Door-to-Door Notifications

When an evacuation order is issued for a certain geographic location, public safety personnel (usually law enforcement) may conduct in-person or door-to-door notifications. Door-to-door notifications can be highly effective, especially when reaching people who are asleep, deaf or hard of hearing, in rural areas, or not reached by other warning technologies. Depending on the size of the evacuation location, public safety officials may not be able to physically "door knock" every residence and may choose to use a public address system and/or hi-lo siren in their emergency response vehicle, to make emergency notifications.

Alert and Warning Practitioners

Alerting Practitioners are individuals who have been designated and trained to draft and distribute the alert and warning messages through the approved notification systems.

To ensure practitioners are knowledgeable in emergency messaging, Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services will provide annual training and proficiency testing for the users responsible for notifications to the public.

User Roles

Users of the Emergency Notification Systems (ENS) are broken into two separate groups, each of which requires a different level of training and experience.

Ventura County Public Alerting Practitioner

- Users are responsible for sending alert and warning products to the public, using the ENS.
- Users must undergo annual training and certification, administered by Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services, to perform this function.

Agency Alerting Practitioner

- Users in this group are responsible for authoring and publishing messages to personnel within their own agency.
- Users are not permitted to issue alerts and warning products to the public.
- Users are required to complete an initial training before being provided access to the system. Ongoing training and certification are not required.

Public Alerting Practitioner Training Requirements

Individuals that require approval as a Public Alerting Authority must meet the following training and certification requirements. All certifications will be reviewed and approved by the Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services Director prior to issuance.

1. Candidates must be employed on a full-time basis by a Ventura County municipality.
2. Complete FEMA IS-247 & IS-251 courses.
3. Complete ENS system training with Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services Alert and Warning Training Coordinator.
4. Demonstrate proficiency in issuing a public alert during a proctored examination by the Alert and Warning Training Coordinator.
5. Complete a basic background investigation by the Ventura County Sheriff's Office Background Investigation Unit.
6. Apply to Sheriff's Emergency Services to receive certification as a Public Alerting Practitioner.

Agency Alerting Practitioner Training Requirements

Individuals responsible for accessing the ENS to issue alerts internally to their own organization may do so after completing basic user training. All accounts will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure utilization and proficiency.

System & User Testing Frequency

Ventura County ENS Testing Frequency					
Action	Responsible Agency	FREQUENCY			
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Annually
VC ENS System Check	VC Sheriff	X			
ENS System Activation	VC Sheriff		X		
FEMA IPAWS Lab Test Notification	VC Sheriff			X	
Emergency Alert System Test	VC Sheriff			X	
VC Public Alerting Authority Training	VC Sheriff				X
VC ENS Administrator Training	VC Sheriff				X

VC Public Alerting Authority Training & Proficiency Requirements					
Action	Responsible Agency	FREQUENCY			
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Annually
Login to ENS System	Practitioner			X	
Publish a Public Alert/warning	Practitioner				X
Attend Annual Training	Practitioner				X
Author Message for Publication	Practitioner				X
Upload new contacts to ENS system	Practitioner				X

Alert and Warning - Activation Criteria

Alert and warning systems may be used to notify the public under a variety of conditions. The types of systems used are influenced by the nature of the specific threat, the size of the area affected, and other factors. Ultimate discretion on system use falls upon Ventura County Sheriff's Emergency Services. In some cases, a judgement call, on the part of the Alerting Practitioner, is necessary. When time permits, the practitioner should consult with responding agencies to weigh factors that should be considered before launching an alert.

SCENARIO	VC Alert	Wireless Emergency Alert	Emergency Alert System	Social Media	VCEmergency.com	Door to Door Notifications	United Water Siren System	National Weather Service Alert	Hi-Lo Siren / PA Systems
Dam Failure	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Earthquake	X	X		X	X		X		
Evacuation Order	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Evacuation Warning	X			X	X				
Hazard Advisory	X			X	X				
Hazardous Materials Incident	X			X	X				
Missing Person < 12 Hours	X			X	X				
Missing Person > 12 Hours	X			X	X				
Oil Spill	X			X	X				
Power Outage - Extended Duration	X			X	X				
Public Safety Power Shutoff Warning	X			X	X				
Severe Weather Alert	X		X	X	X			X	
Smoke Advisory	X			X	X				
Special Event Notification				X	X				
Water Outage	X			X	X				
Wildfire	X	X	X	X	X	X			

The above criteria notwithstanding, the Alerting Authority is to use best judgement and err on the side of caution.

Alert and Warning Message Content

Successful alert and warning messages have specific common components. However, circumstances may not allow for all components to be included. The Alert Practitioner may not have sufficient incident information or - in the case of WEA, NWR, and TDD - the systems limit the length of messages.

Specific message components include:

- Identify the Alert Authority
- Description of threat
- Guidance for protective action (Evacuation Warning or Order/Shelter-in-Place)
- Location of hazard/Shelter-in-Place or evacuation areas
- Time available to act (IMMEDIATE/NOW or timeframe if available)
- Future information source (always include vcemergency.com)

Special Considerations

Culturally Appropriate Messaging

Communities may respond to messaging in an alert in different ways. For example, some residents may respond with hesitation or distrust to instructions issued from the government.

It is important to locate trusted agents within the community prior to an incident who can help educate the community on the jurisdiction's alert and warning program. These may include religious leaders, non-profit agency representatives, local elected officials, or prominent business owners. Leveraging the relationships that have been established with these leaders will be a force multiplier when the time comes for a warning to be communicated out to the community.

Ensuring Accessible Messaging

To ensure messages are developed for maximum accessibility, alerting platforms should include the ability to control the following:

- TTY/TTD
- Font size
- Color analyzer
- Sound & vibrations
- Flashes
- Use of attachments (video)
- 508 compliances (use of screen-readers)
- Posting of accessible electronic content, documents, and videos
- Video relay as an option

Language Accessibility

The state of California is comprised of many diverse communities, some of which have Limited English Proficiency. Identifying the most commonly used languages and having a process in place to translate warning messages will ensure the greatest number of residents receive the warnings that are being sent. It is important, however, to not let the inability to translate a message delay notification when time is of the essence and lives are at risk.

All alerts should be in both English and Spanish. The following methods of translation from English to Spanish will be utilized IN THIS ORDER:

1. Use of **pre-scripted English and Spanish templates.**
2. Request the assistance of a bilingual colleague with experience translating emergency alerting concepts.
3. Request the assistance of a professional translation service.

At no time should an alert requiring immediate action be delayed because of delays in translation.

Evacuation & Warning Types

Depending on the scenario, a variety of notification types may be used to communicate vital information to the public.

Advisory

- An advisory level message may be issued before, during or following an incident. Advisories are typically non-emergent in nature and are meant to share information about an incident. Generally, advisory messages are informational only and should not be used to convey emergency information.

Evacuation Order

- Evacuation Orders may be initiated by law enforcement, Fire Departments, Public Health Agencies, and in rare cases some federal agencies when residents are requested to vacate the area due to an imminent threat. All non-essential persons are requested to leave the area immediately.
- Conditions exist that **SERIOUSLY IMPERIL** or **ENDANGER** the lives of those in the defined area.
- The danger is **IMMINENT!**
- Generally, residents will not be forcibly removed from their own property, however those found to be on public property including roadways and public parks may be subject to removal from the area.
- Once out of the area, the public (including residents) will not be permitted to return until conditions permit.
- Any non-essential persons found by officials traveling through, or loitering in, the area will be escorted out and not permitted to re-enter the area. Those found to be interfering with the disaster response are **SUBJECT TO ARREST**.
- Utility workers in work vehicles including Southern California Edison, the Gas Company, etc. shall be permitted beyond closures for official business only.
- Subsequent to §409.5(d) p.c., nothing shall prevent a duly authorized representative of any news service, newspaper, or radio or television station or network from entering the area unless the area is determined to be a crime scene.

Evacuation Warning

- Evacuation warnings may be initiated by law enforcement, Fire Departments, Public Health Agencies, and in rare cases federal agencies. Evacuation Warnings are issued when residents should begin preparing for a potential mandatory evacuation order to be issued. Access to the area under an evacuation warning may or may not be restricted by a soft or hard closure.
- The threat to lives is **NOT YET IMMINENT**.
- Due to the potential for rapidly changing conditions to develop into a serious threat, residents are advised to prepare for the issuance of an evacuation order.

- Residents should prepare personal belongings including pets and livestock for evacuation.
- Advance measures should be taken to prevent harm to individuals with mobility issues or other types of access and functional needs.

Shelter-in Place Order

- Conditions exist that may ENDANGER the lives of those in a defined area.
- Access to the area under a shelter in place order may or may not be restricted by a soft or hard closure.
- Residents should select an interior room or rooms within their home or business with no or few windows and take refuge there.

Alert Coordination

Disasters are not typically limited to jurisdictional boundaries. However, Alerting Authorities are generally bound to their own jurisdiction. When considering issuing an alert and/or warning to the public, jurisdictional coordination, communication, and collaboration should be a priority.

To the extent a warning originator has the ability, warnings should be targeted to the area known to be at risk, while coordinating with any other affected jurisdictions as soon as possible. If the initial warning originator lacks the ability to deliver warnings to the at-risk area, coordination with other jurisdictions should be given priority. Having relationships in place to ensure continuity of operations is imperative. If a warning is issued from a higher level of government or jurisdiction, lower levels within the target area of the initial warning need not repeat that warning. However, local jurisdictions should issue additional warning messages, or request assistance from an Alerting Authority, if needed, to communicate local variations on the recommended protective action, to expand the target area for the message, or to utilize local warning dissemination capabilities that will enhance delivery of the warning to those at risk.

Evacuation messages are particularly demanding on their originators, as they must be coordinated with agencies responsible for transport, traffic control, and evacuee reception and sheltering. Confusing and/or uncoordinated evacuation orders can have unintended adverse consequences. Evacuation messages must come from the jurisdiction's designated authority, often the local law enforcement authority and should address issues such as:

- Nature of the emergency and/or problem and level of exigency
- Direction and destination of travel (include a map image if possible)
- Routes to be used and/or avoided.
- Means of travel (by auto, by bus, on foot, etc.)
- Accessible transportation and sheltering resources
- Things to take along (papers, medications, pets, etc.)
- Expected duration of relocation (a few hours, a day, etc.)
- Phone or social media links for additional information

Procedure to Issue an Alert

In the event the Ventura County Operational Area EOC is not activated, Public Alerting Practitioners may initiate a VC Alert emergency notification for an incident impacting their jurisdiction, without prior approval. Practitioners are requested to provide a courtesy notification to the Sheriff's Emergency Services Duty Officer by calling 805-947-8210. All other requests for alerts and warnings, including wireless emergency alerts, emergency alert system messages and VC Emergency messaging, should be made by contacting the Sheriff's Emergency Services Duty Officer at 805-947-8210 or by emailing oes.oes@ventura.org.

Issuing Alerts During an EOC Activation

In the event the Ventura County Operational Area EOC is activated, all emergency notifications will be centralized and issued via the Alert and Warning Coordinator in Ventura County Operational Area EOC Operations Section. The impacted jurisdiction must call the Alert and Warning Coordinator at (805-654-5184) or call the Sheriff's Emergency Services Duty Officer at 805-947-8210.