

# The FCC and FEMA National Emergency Alerting Workshop Overview

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On June 10, 2010, The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) hosted a workshop called 21st Century Emergency Alerting: Leveraging Multiple Technologies to Bring Alerts and Warnings to the Public. The focal point of the conference, held at the FCC's Washington, D.C. facility, examined the evolution and shift of next generation alerting and the dissemination of emergency information to the public as technology progresses.

The conference consisted of two panels discussions. Division Director of the FEMA Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Antwane Johnson moderated a discussion on the current state of public alerts and warnings. The presentation focused on integration of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) into the IPAWS.

Jeffery Goldthorp chief of the communications systems analysis division of the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau (PSHSB), moderated a panel discussion on how broadband technologies can be used by IPAWS to redefine alert distribution technologies, such as EAS and CMAS. The group keyed in on how using Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) to its full potential will help develop a broadband-based, multi-platform alerting system.

The conference shed light on current issues and concerns being raised through the work of the FCC, FEMA and industry leaders. Panel representatives from the FCC and FEMA outlined progress that has been made and what still needs to be done to achieve a next generation national alerting system.

Further concerns were voiced regarding the government-mandated 180 day clock as too limited a time period, how and what types of training for operators, clarification of codes, the creation of system standardizations, and how to deal with different state platforms. Questions about the alert system itself, such as what languages and how many would be utilized, and what alerting formats (text, video) would be available, were also raised.

The alert's 90-character limit and the function of the alerting message was addressed, along with disagreements over how the public will find secondary information using either television and radio or social networks. The 90-character limit will be utilized as a "bell ringer" for the public to recognize there is an emergency. This will do one of two things; 1) alert the public to get to safety, or 2) alert the public to go to a secondary information source for further details on the emergency. This second action did bring up discussion as to where people will go to find secondary information details. No resounding decision on television and radio versus social networks was arrived at. Lastly, the panel discussed the 2011 national alerting test exercise and what steps the FCC and FEMA must take before it can occur.

Moving forward with the Next Generation National Alerting System, the FCC and FEMA will need to address the concerns raised by industry to continue their work on 21st century alerting. Though no concrete information was disseminated regarding how the FCC and FEMA would address the concerns put forth by industry members; representatives of both agencies did wholeheartedly appreciate the discussions of the two panels that day, and were very interested in further collaboration.