



In Control: A Guide to Navigating Emergency Alerting With Authority and Precision

How to Stop Hesitating and Learn to Use
IPAWS With Confidence

By OnSolve in collaboration with Eddie Bertola and Peter Gaynor

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Introduction

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Every year, [approximately 7,000 Wireless Emergency Alerts](#) (WEAs) are issued by federal, state and local governments, as well as tribes and territories. These alerts cover a wide range of hazards, from weather warnings and watches to AMBER Alerts. However, they all come through a single platform: The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS).

Emergency managers have two main goals when a disaster strikes:

- 1 Protect lives.
- 2 Minimize property damage.

There are three things emergency managers must do in order to accomplish these goals:

- 1 Craft clear, precise communications that tell those in danger exactly what to do.
- 2 Send the message at the right time.
- 3 Have an effective way to distribute the information.

There have been a growing number of instances where lifesaving WEA messages were never sent or were sent late. The Lahaina, Maui tragedy is the most recent in a string of “it didn’t have to be this way” events. When emergency officials don’t issue an alert soon enough or not at all, the repercussions can be severe — resulting in more lives lost and more damage to communities.

We have come a long way in building a technologically reliable national alert and warning system. However, we have failed in the soft skills needed to ensure those charged with pushing the “send message” button have the appropriate level of confidence that their action will result in a positive outcome.

More simply stated:

There are some that are reluctant or afraid to push the send button because they fear the consequences of a wrong decision. The main causes of fear are:

- Stress
- Liability concerns
- General confusion
- Budget/Cost concerns
- Lack of training and practice
- The unknown (What will happen if I press it?)
- Prior negative experience(s)

The solution is simple:

To improve confidence, you must improve competence. This involves creating muscle memory, gathering knowledge of the alerting ecosystem, conducting effective training and adopting a mindset shift. Competency creates a sense of self-assurance, especially during those defining moments when you need to send an emergency alert.

How To Use This Resource

This guide is designed to increase the confidence of those charged with pushing the send button. It is not meant to be an exhaustive treatise on emergency alerting. Rather, it is a concise handbook that provides tips, tools and tactics to help emergency managers confidently press the send button when it counts the most.

Most of the sections in this guide are divided into two sections:

- 1 Mission Critical Knowledge:** The essential information everyone should know. The details provided here should be bookmarked so you can reference them as needed during an emergency.
- 2 Continuing Education:** The supplemental information here is a great resource for certain roles and job functions on your team that require a deeper understanding of the entire emergency alerting process.

The guide also includes a checklist you can use to make sure you have all of the critical steps in all of the phases of the emergency alerting process covered. Feel free to hang up physical copies of this checklist for your entire team to use.

