

The Mindset Shift: Sending With Confidence



Mission Critical Knowledge

A comprehensive and up-to-date program and regular training will help alleviate the apprehension around how to use the IPAWS emergency alerting system. But we still need to shift our mindset to fully overcome the fear and actually press “send.”

What Might Go Wrong?

Often, those with the authority to send an emergency alert waste precious time thinking about what might go wrong.

As the clock is ticking, officials often ask themselves:

- What if I make the situation worse?
- What if I set something in motion that unnecessarily drains resources?
- What if I get fired?

These fears often result in officials continuing to go up the chain of command, asking for permission to launch an alert. The result? Paralysis — The alert goes out too late or not at all, causing more lives to be lost and more property to be damaged.

Potential issues include:



Lack of Information

This becomes an issue when an alerting authority sends out an alert, warning or notification with only certain pieces of the puzzle. This can easily turn into a “The sky is falling!” situation. When the community reads the message, it only contains enough information for people to become scared and/or confused. Neither one of these emotions leads to good decision making and will generally not empower the community to act in the way you intended them to act.

There are two best practices to help avoid this issue:

- 1 Have someone who doesn't have all of the inside information review the message to identify missing details you may be assuming others know.
- 2 Make sure you include all of the parts of a complete message (which we cover later in this guide). From a high level, however, this can be accomplished by using the Message Design Dashboard to train before an incident and even during the crafting of the specific message during the incident. It doesn't take much more effort and will provide the community with the best possible message.



Incorrect Information

Even if you include all the components of a complete message, sometimes the information is just incorrect. In the heat of the moment, it's important to take a few extra seconds to double check the information. This can be as simple as checking the spelling of streets, cities and names of those involved. If you're using a hyperlink, make sure it's written correctly, and it works. You may think this is an unnecessary step, but unfortunately this does happen, and the community ends up clicking on a link that doesn't provide them anything but frustration.



Too Wide of an Activation Area

Activation Areas are not a one-size-fits-all approach. You should not always presume to extend your activation reach to the outer boundaries of your jurisdiction. Continue to weigh the balance of alerting fatigue with the current needs of the situation. Base the activation area on actual information from the investigation or situation rather than what you always do.

Keep records on the size of activation areas and the impact it has on the community and the outcome on the case. Follow the information instead of past practices. There are times when it's possible to focus on a smaller activation area and still address the issue and help those in need without causing alarm in a wider area.



Lack of Training

You can't escape training. You may postpone it, but it will happen. There is pre-event training and on-the-job training. The goal is to get as much of the pre-event training as possible because the on-the-job training often comes at a much higher cost to your time, money and well-being.

There are those that have deep scars from tragic experiences resulting from on-the-job training. If you ask them, they will tell you they wished they could go back and better prepare themselves for these incidents.

While you can't account for every variable in an emergency situation, you can and should account for yourself, your training and your preparation to respond to a call you receive. The 'What if?' game is dangerous enough without you having to think back and know you could have applied an alerting tool differently if you only knew then what you learned after the emergency incident.

The Paradigm Shift

In this business we live with risk every day. It's impossible to eliminate it. Our job is to minimize risk to an acceptable level. The overarching goal is action. Taking a positive action (even if it's not perfect) that protects life and minimizes property damage in a timely manner is our ultimate goal.

Emergency officials need to shift their mindset and accept they will not always be perfect. Mistakes WILL happen. Emergencies are low frequency/high risk situations. The stress level is high, and in the heat of the moment, the alert may contain a misspelling or lack a piece of information. And that's okay.

Every mistake is a chance to hone your skills and make the process better the next time by asking:

What can we do differently?

We need to stop fearing mistakes and instead fear inaction.

Officials who have been through an emergency and didn't launch an alert quickly can tell you they do not want to be in that situation again. It is in your best interest to take action and press "send!"

Think about what will happen if you take NO ACTION (loss of life) compared to what will happen by taking positive ACTION (lives saved). Most of us would rather be found guilty of taking too much action as opposed to being found guilty for doing too little (or nothing at all).

