



FEMA

Integrated Public Alert and Warning System

Frequently Asked Questions for State and Local Government Officials

Software and Equipment

I already have methods to activate Emergency Alert System (EAS) and National Weather Radio (NWR). Why do I need IPAWS?

By using the Integrated Public and Warning System (IPAWS), you will be able to use a single alert message to activate multiple alerting systems, to make the public alerting process faster and more accurate across more channels. IPAWS is the only means of sending a Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA).

I do not currently have any alerting software or equipment. What should I do?

You may want to check with your state emergency management agency as to whether they have statewide plans for implementing IPAWS. You can also consult the latest list of companies that have executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with FEMA IPAWS for the purpose of gaining access to the IPAWS-Open Platform for Emergency Networks (OPEN) Test Environment to support interoperable software; this information is available at <http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=5670>. The company names marked with the section symbol (§) have demonstrated successful IPAWS-compliant capability. Links are also provided to the Responder Knowledge Base for encoder/decoder equipment manufacturers that have successfully completed IPAWS testing.

Are there grants available to purchase alerting systems?

Yes, IPAWS grant guidance for Fiscal Year (FY) 15 is available at: <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/105518>. You may also want to consider sharing the cost of software and/or equipment with mutual aid organizations, neighboring jurisdictions, or nearby major public or private sector installations who would also benefit from a faster, more consistent alerting system.

I have a CAP-compliant software system. Will it work with IPAWS?

Not necessarily. The software must be updated to Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) version 1.2 and implement additional requirements of the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) IPAWS Profile specification to work with all IPAWS alert dissemination systems.

I have Emergency Alert System (EAS) encoder equipment. Will it work with IPAWS?

Consult the developers list to see if your equipment is listed and has a link to the Responder Knowledge Base. Contact your vendor to determine if you need a software, firmware, or hardware upgrade. Your equipment must have an Internet connection.

I have signs/siren system/emergency telephone notification system. Will it work with IPAWS?

Additional Common Alerting Protocol controller equipment may be used to activate other local systems from IPAWS, or you may work with your system integrator to develop a customized solution.

We use social media for emergency alerts. Does IPAWS support social media?

Your IPAWS-compliant software may be able to create an alert “news feed” from your IPAWS account that can be used to populate social media. In addition, IPAWS is currently working with major internet content providers and additional progress is expected in the near future.

For more information: <http://www.fema.gov/ipaws>

To contact the IPAWS Project Management Office: ipaws@fema.dhs.gov

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Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) Application Process

What is a Collaborative Operating Group (COG)?

A Collaborative Operating Group is a term used by the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to designate an organization that is responsible for coordinating emergency management or incident response activities. COGs consist of individual members who may represent one or more disciplines or organizations. COGs may be organized at the national level (e.g., the National Weather Service is a COG), multi-state level (e.g., regional mutual aid organization), state level, tribal level, multi-county level, single county level, single municipality, or single agency. Although COGs are usually formed by government, private sector representatives may also be COG members.

Who controls who belongs to my Collaborative Operating Group (COG)?

You do. You should document Collaborative Operating Group governance to include membership eligibility, responsibilities, training requirements, etc.

How do I get a Collaborative Operating Group (COG)?

A sponsoring organization (e.g., a local government) completes a brief application for a Memorandum of Agreement with FEMA governing system security. See:

<http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/112266>. A custom MOA is prepared and returned to the applicant for signature. Once approved by FEMA, you will receive your Collaborative Operating Group ID number, COG name, and digital certificate. These are necessary to configure the system so that alerts are properly routed to and from your organization.

What do I do with the digital certificate I received?

You should coordinate with the vendor(s) listed on your Memorandum of Agreement to install the digital certificate. You may not give the certificate to anyone else.

If I change my software, do I need to update my Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)?

Yes, you must inform FEMA if anything contained in your Memorandum of Agreement changes. A software change would be an update to the MOA Appendices and does not require the MOA to be resigned.

Now that I have a Collaborative Operating Group (COG), what can I do with it?

If your software supports it, you may exchange alerts with other Collaborative Operating Groups. You are not yet ready to issue public alerts. A separate application is required to enable public alerting access.

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Public Alerting Application Process

What do I do with the public alerting application form?

You will receive the public alerting application form directly from FEMA if you indicated on your Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that one or more systems will be used for public alerting. You complete the top part of the form to indicate which alerting systems you are applying for (Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), National Weather Services (NWS), Public Feed), the geographic area of your responsibility, and the event codes that you are authorized to use in your area. Once complete, you send to the state review point of contact that has been provided with the form.

Why does the state review my public alerting application?

Because operational plans for public alerting differ from state to state, FEMA has requested that each state emergency management agency designate points of contact to review the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Public Alerting Applications for consistency with relevant state plans. The state reviewer will return the form to you so you will know that it has been completed.

Who is required to complete the FEMA Emergency Management Institute's (EMI) IS-247a IPAWS online training course?

The Primary Point of Contact (POC) for the Collaborative Operating Group (COG), and any other COG members who have the ability to transmit public alerts from your software system are required to complete the training. If you are the primary POC, you will be required to submit a copy of your certificate of completion as part of the application process. Training records for all other members must be maintained locally by the COG.

Next Steps

How do I get access to National Weather Service (NWS) dissemination systems?

A separate registration process is required for access to the National Weather Service dissemination services, including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio broadcast. You will need your Collaborative Operating Group ID number and name to complete and submit the registration. Go to <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/hazcollect/> for further information.

How do I test my system?

You should work with your developer to test your system. Please note that it is a violation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules to use a "live" event code (other than a test code i.e., Required Monthly Test (RMT) or Required Weekly (RWT)) without getting an express waiver for the purpose from the FCC.

Can one alert message reach all dissemination systems?

Yes, if you have the corresponding alerting permissions, and your message meets the criteria for each system, a single alert can trigger all the available systems. Your developer has been provided with documentation on the specific requirements of each dissemination system as well as methods to test for conformance.

Where do I get help with my software?

FEMA cannot assist you with your specific software. Please contact your vendor for user support.