



FEMA

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER PREVENTION AND PREDICTION
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE

ON
PUBLIC ALERT AND WARNING

**FOR RELEASE ONLY BY THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER
PREVENTION AND PREDICTION**

Good morning, Chairman DeMint and members of the Committee. I am Reynold N. Hoover, the Director of the Office of National Security Coordination (ONSC) within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the role and activities of the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA to support the important mission of public alert and warning using an Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) approach.

FEMA, through my office, serves as the Lead Agent for the Federal Executive Branch's Continuity of Operations (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) programs and as the Executive Agent for the national-level Emergency Alert System (EAS). Our office also functions as the Department's Program Manager for the IPAWS initiative of which EAS is a component. As such, we are working in close cooperation with the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection (IAIP) Directorate to facilitate coordinated efforts within the Department. I also serve as one of the managing Co-Chairs of the White House Task Force on Effective Warning that was chartered by the Office of Science Technology and Policy and Homeland Security Council. This recently established Task Force has representation from key public alert and warning stakeholders in the Federal Executive Branch and is Co-Chaired by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). On all of these public alert and warning initiatives, we share close relationships with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) which generally regulates EAS technical standards, procedures and protocols, and with NOAA which is a primary EAS user.

We appreciate the Alert and Warning funds Congress has provided to the Department to improve our alert and warning capabilities. Your funding will help us provide Americans with critical and timely information alerts and warning that will save lives and property. This morning I would like to take a few moments to tell you about the EAS and IPAWS which is the foundation upon which the Department is improving, and building, an enhanced capability to provide nationwide alert and warning using cutting edge technologies, in an integrated and coordinated manner.

The EAS in its current form was established in 1994 and is essentially a cascade, trickle down, distribution system from the FEMA Operations Centers to 34 designated Primary Entry Point (PEP) radio broadcast stations. At the request of the President, we distribute a Presidential level message to the PEP stations, which in turn re-broadcast the signal to monitoring stations down stream which then broadcast the message over TV and radios. The system is designed to provide the President the capability to transmit within ten minutes from any location at any time. This Presidential message is mandatory, must take priority over any other message and must preempt other messages in progress. All other broadcasts of emergency messages are voluntary. Nevertheless, State and local emergency managers can, and do, activate the EAS for state and local public alert and warning messages such as AMBER alerts, hazardous material incidents and weather warnings. NOAA, and the National Weather Service, serve as the originator of emergency weather information, and play a significant role in the implementation of EAS at the state and local level. While FEMA tests on a weekly basis the connectivity to the 34 PEP stations, the national level EAS has never been fully activated.

As you are well aware, the tragic events of September 11th caused a paradigm shift in how we think about homeland security and, in particular, alert and warning. As efficient and useful as the EAS has been, we in FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security realize that the alert and warning system that so many millions of people depend upon is not everything to everyone all of the time. With the alert and warning funding provided this year, FEMA, IAIP and our partners in the Federal government are making great progress in our ability to reach more of the people, more of the time. We believe in a very short period of time, leveraging public – private partnerships and using existing digital and other cutting edge technologies, the Department will be able to provide all hazards alerts and warning to the greatest number of people. This includes persons with disabilities and individuals for whom English is a second language.

For example, we have been conducting a Digital Emergency Alert System pilot project in the National Capital Region with the Association of Public Television Stations. This pilot has successfully demonstrated how the capabilities of America’s public broadcasters can be utilized to dramatically enhance our ability to provide the American people with critical, and lifesaving, information. Significantly, through the voluntary cooperation and full participation of public and commercial broadcasters, satellite radio, the cellular telephone industry, technology developers, pager service providers, cable operators, and others, we have successfully demonstrated an ability to transmit a variety of alert and warning messages via digital television and satellite to a full range of retransmission media using a common alerting protocol. We are especially pleased that NOAA and the FCC have been full partners with us in this Digital Alert and Warning

System pilot and have recently added the Department of Justice and The Weather Channel to our list of pilot participants.

Building upon the success of our Digital EAS pilot we have begun a second phase expansion in which we will replicate our experience in the National Capitol Region at other sites across the country using public television's existing digital infrastructure. Our intent in this second phase of the Digital EAS pilot is to demonstrate a national capability, identify technological challenges, and develop a nationwide implementation plan.

Because there is no single solution set available that can provide for all of the alert and warning systems requirements for Federal, State and local users, our IPAWS uses a "system of systems" approach and does not totally rely upon the digital infrastructure of Public Television. Working in partnership with NOAA we are including under the IPAWS umbrella a Geo-Targeted Alerting System (GTAS), which uses reverse 911 technology, to demonstrate and test the ability to provide targeted warning down to the individual household or business. This GTAS pilot will be conducted in the National Capital Region with the goal of expanding alert and warning capabilities to include plume hazard warning.

Since the beginning of the IPAWS initiative our focus has been demonstrating and developing the best technologies available without regard to the emergency message content. Moreover, because we are incorporating common alerting protocols and using digital technology we have better positioned a national alert and warning system to be an all hazards system. In this regard, the recent passage of the Intelligence Reform Bill directed the Department to work with

the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) to demonstrate an Amber Alert like web portal. We have been working with NASCIO to finalize a Cooperative Agreement that will help us add another powerful dimension to the IPAWS. This effort will also build upon the successes and lessons learned that the Department of Justice has demonstrated in not only partnering with the wireless community to provide missing child alerts, but also providing an effective web based portal solution for its Amber Alert program.

A primary mission of our office remains assuring the ability of the President, and senior government leaders, to address the nation under the most extreme circumstances. This year, we are upgrading the Primary Entry Point (PEP) system from its current ground-based dial up capability to a satellite distribution system. We will also be expanding the number of PEP broadcast stations so that each state and territory will have a direct satellite receive capability. These critical upgrades will ensure the survivability of radio broadcast systems in the event of a catastrophic incident. Moreover, by leveraging public – private partnerships with satellite and public radio, we are able to significantly enhance the Emergency Alert System without a major investment in new infrastructure.

We recognize that there is no single solution set that will meet everyone's alert and warning requirements, that is why FEMA, IAIP and the Department has teamed up with NOAA, the FCC, DOJ and the private sector to find the most appropriate interoperable solutions to develop the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System approach. We believe that IPAWS, using digital technology in combination with upgraded Primary Entry Point EAS capabilities, will provide Federal, state and local emergency managers and leaders with the tools they need to

alert America about both man-made and natural disasters. At the same time we are aware of the concerns of our state partners who have invested in their own alert and warning systems. With that in mind, IPAWS is intended to be fully interoperable with those systems using common alerting protocols. As we proceed, we will continue to reach out to state and local users to integrate a national alert and warning system into their existing capabilities which will result in significant improvements in public awareness during hazardous events.

Because our IPAWS framework is based upon the premise of providing alert and warning messaging in a coordinated manner, over as many platforms as possible, to ensure the widest dissemination and public receive capabilities, the Department of Homeland Security is also providing funds to NOAA for system upgrades to the NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards network. In addition, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Commerce, IAIP is funding a pilot program to purchase NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards receivers for certain public schools across the nation. We are also reaching out to the many stakeholders and alert and warning systems users through a series of IPAWS seminars. Our first seminar was conducted in April and brought together Federal, state, local, and private sector groups to begin a dialog with us on IPAWS. Significantly, the seminar attendees included representatives from the disabled community who told us about the challenges they face with regard to alert and warning. We are continuing that dialogue and working to incorporate their concerns with IPAWS solutions. The Department, and our Federal partners, will continue these IPAWS outreach seminars as a means to educate the public and ensure we are adding needed alert and warning capabilities – not adding another burden on those who use and depend upon such systems to save lives and protect property.

We are pleased that the FCC, last year, issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking with regard to the Emergency Alert System. We believe that the FCC's efforts in this matter will help us strengthen and improve alert and warning for the general public and we look forward to continuing our close cooperation with the Commission as they move toward a decision.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Task Force on Effective Warning that I mentioned at the outset of my remarks is working to develop a national alert and warning policy that recognizes the IPAWS solution. Moreover, with the help of the Department of Interior's USGS, and other emergency message originators in the Federal government, we will be able to build upon their experiences and capabilities to incorporate tsunami, earthquake and other warnings to the public into a national all hazards IPAWS.

Mr. Chairman these are just some examples of how FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security has taken seriously its responsibility to ensure the quick and accurate dissemination of alert and warning information to our homeland security partners and the American public.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak, for your support of the Department's mission, and for your interest in effective alert and warning systems. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.