



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC WARNING

PUBLIC ALERT & WARNING – A NATIONAL DUTY, A NATIONAL CHALLENGE IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

THE IMPERATIVE

Between 1975 and 1995 “twenty-five thousand Americans died and more than a hundred thousand were injured in natural disasters...”¹ According to the Office of Science and Technology Policy, natural disasters cost the nation an average of one billion dollars each week and consume nearly one percent of GDP. Terrorist attacks take lives, destroy property and disrupt the fabric of American life.

Americans do not expect their government to preserve and protect them from all these risks. However, because of government’s duty to promote the public welfare, and its unmatched ability to gather, analyze, and disseminate risk information, Americans do expect government to give them significant warning so they can act to limit damage to themselves, their property, and their communities. Indeed, event post-mortems more often focus on the adequacy of warning than on the prudence of the public’s response. For government, there is no escape from public judgment on its performance in warning those who subsequently become victims.

The challenge is clear. We live in the most technologically advanced nation in the history of the world. Ours is the Information Age, and whether in business or personal life, Communication is King. The public, reasonably, has a right to expect that government, if it cannot protect them, will at least effectively communicate to them critical advice and information on imminent risks. Unfortunately, the United States does not have the capability to provide the type of warning information that Americans expect and should have. We continue to use yesterday’s technologies for 21st century challenges.

THE PROBLEM

Existing national alert and warning systems are fragmented at all levels of government, are unable to target only those people at risk, provide inconsistent messages, lack coordination, and are often not interoperable. Each program has its own scale for measuring risk and its own method for reaching those at risk. Existing systems also fail to reach many people at risk while warning and alarming many who are not at risk. As a result, individuals at risk fail to get timely information, fail to understand or act on the information and often don’t know where to go for additional information. Those not at risk who receive warnings of little relevance may come to view the system with skepticism, if not distrust.

Existing alert and warning systems may not be available during times of emergency, such as the recent blackout in the Northeast. The lack of an effective warning capability also frequently puts public safety workers at risk – as they are asked to personally deliver public warnings into high risk areas -- warnings that could be more effectively and efficiently delivered with modern technologies.

More effective and timely alert and warnings would save lives, reduce property loss and speed economic recovery. Moreover, more effective alert and warnings would increase Americans’ respect for the system, and their appreciation for and support of the national and local institutions and companies involved. In May 2003 the Partnership for Public Warning published “*A National Strategy for Integrated Public Warning Policy and Capability*.” This document sets forth a vision and a road map for creating an effective national, all-hazard alert and warning capability.

¹ *Lessons from PPP2000: Living With Earth’s Extremes*, Report to the Office of Science and Technology Policy Subcommittee on Natural Disaster Reduction, Institute for Business and Home Safety, September 2001

THE GOAL

To create a national consensus on a national, all-hazard public warning capability that will provide citizens at risk during times of emergency with timely and useful information to enable them to take appropriate actions to save lives and property. Such a capability will:

- Support multiple warning sources (President, federal officials, state officials, local officials and authorized private officials (e.g. nuclear plant));
- Take advantage of existing national assets such as Weather Radio and the Emergency Alert System;
- Enable local emergency managers to provide more effective public warnings;
- Ensure that only authorized officials may enter alerts and warnings;
- Be secure, redundant and available 24/7;
- Be based on an open, non-proprietary architecture;
- Employ uniform alert and warning terminology that is clearly understood by recipients regardless of geographic location;
- Support multiple languages and users with physical disabilities;
- Support multiple distribution channels employing multiple technologies (e.g. telephones, cell phones, PDA's, personal computers, TV's, radios and other consumer electronics);
- Involve all public and private stake holders in its development and operation.

THE PROPOSAL

The Partnership for Public Warning, a non-profit consortium, proposes to develop and recommend an architecture and framework for an improved national alert and warning capability. This project will be pursued under the leadership of the appropriate federal agency (or agencies) and will include the active participation of all public and private stakeholders interested in alert and warning issues. The five key elements to this proposal are:

Collaboration and Consensus
Existing Infrastructure Assessment
Interoperability and Integration
Creating a National Alert and Warning Capability
Education and Awareness

Collaboration and Consensus

Objective: ensure that all stakeholders (local government, state government, federal government, private industry, non-profit community, etc.) are involved in the development of a national alert and warning capability and that recommendations provided to the appropriate authorities represent a consensus of the involved stakeholders.

Activities:

- Develop and manage a collaborative process that provides for participation by all interested stakeholders. This includes, but is not limited to, the appropriate federal agencies (Department of Homeland Security, Department of Commerce, FCC, etc.), state, county and local officials, private industry, the non-profit community and the public.
- Sponsor regional workshops on alert and warning.
- Sponsor a national summit on alert and warning.
- Develop and implement a program for recognizing excellence in the alert and warning community.

Products:

- A collaborative process that involves all interested stakeholders.
- A directory of warning originators and officials at the local, state and federal levels and relevant public entities.
- Regional workshops on alert and warning.
- A national summit on alert and warning.
- An awards and recognition program for excellence in alert and warning.

Existing Infrastructure Assessment

Objective: assess existing warning systems and technologies and develop recommendations for integrating existing legacy systems (e.g. NOAA Weather Radio and Emergency Alert System) into an improved national alert and warning capability.

Activities:

- Identify those federal agencies with warning responsibilities and conduct an assessment of the nation's legacy systems - NOAA Weather Radio, NAWAS and the Emergency Alert System -- to determine how to integrate these systems into an integrated national warning capability;
- Identify and assess key alert and warning systems in place or being tested throughout the nation at the local and state level.
- Identify and document existing alert and warning technologies now available or soon to be available from the private sector.
- Conduct research to determine how citizens receive warning information, how timely such warnings are and public perceptions of the value of such warnings.

Products:

- An assessment of the key federal legacy systems (Weather Radio, NAWAS and the Emergency Alert System) that includes the scope, geographic coverage, penetration and strengths and weaknesses of each system.
- Recommendations on integrating Weather Radio, NAWAS and EAS into the national alert and warning information system;
- An inventory and description of existing major alert and warning responsibilities and systems at the federal, state and local level;
- An inventory and description of existing and proposed alert and warning technologies.
- A handbook for local and state warning officials that identifies the key warning technologies that are available and provides the advantages and disadvantages of each technology.
- Data regarding the penetration and effectiveness of existing public alert and warning systems.
- Recommendations regarding the characteristics of an effective public alert and warning capability.

Interoperability and Integration

Objective: develop policies, procedures and standards that will facilitate interoperability among different technologies and facilitate the integration of multiple technologies into a single national capability.

Activities:

- Identify, develop and promote a common alerting protocol.
- Develop standard alert and warning terminology, statements and action guidance.
- Identify and document best practices in the alert and warning arena.
- Develop and recommend appropriate policies and procedures for the operation of a national alert and warning capability.
- Identify key policy issues (e.g. liability, privacy, etc.) that would enhance or may impede the development of a national alert and warning capability. Recommend appropriate policy positions.

Products:

- A common alerting protocol.
- A lexicon of standard terminology for alert and warning.
- A compilation of best practices in the alert and warning arena;
- A compendium of proposed policies and procedures necessary for the efficient operation of a national alert and warning system.
- Recommendations on key policy issues that will affect the development and operation of a national alert and warning capability.

Creating a National Alert and Warning Capability

Objective: pull together the research and analysis conducted in the above phases, solicit the input and participation of all the stake holders and develop a consensus on a proposed architecture for a national alert and warning system.

Activities:

- Create a national consensus on a proposed national alert and warning architecture.
- Develop standard metrics for measuring warning effectiveness.
- Manage, evaluate and promote a pilot alert and warning project based upon the architecture.

Products:

- A national consensus on a proposed architecture and framework for a national alert and warning capability;
- Standard metrics for measuring warning effectiveness.
- A demonstration pilot of a national alert and warning information capability.
- An annual report on the state of the nation's alert and warning capability.

Education and Awareness

Objective: provide first responders, emergency managers and decision makers with up-to-date information and educational materials to assist them in implementing and operating effective alert and warning systems. The second objective is to increase public awareness of how alert and warning information will be communicated and educate the public on actions to be taken.

Activities:

- Develop an educational program for first responders, emergency managers and decision makers.
- Develop an educational program for the public.
- Develop and operate a national clearinghouse on alert and warning issues.

Products:

- Educational materials that can be distributed to first responders, emergency managers and decision makers.
- Community education programs for the public.
- Regional workshops.
- A national clearinghouse on alert and warning issues.
- An annual National Public Warning Awareness Day to promote public awareness of alert and warning through community-based tests and educational activities.

THE RESOURCES

It is estimated that all of the above activities can be accomplished in 24 months at a cost of less than \$9 million.

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC WARNING

The Partnership for Public Warning is a unique, non-profit organization where all interested stakeholders, both public and private, are working together to improve the nation's public alert and warning capability. PPW brings together government, industry, non-profits and academia and provides an objective, consensus-based forum for addressing key issues. PPW does not advocate any particular technology or solution. Further information on the Partnership is available at www.PartnershipforPublicWarning.org or at:

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NATIONAL PUBLIC WARNING AWARENESS DAY **INFORMING AND EDUCATING AMERICA**

The creation of an effective national public warning capability in the United States demands the use of the latest technology and the development of uniform standards and protocols. Just as critically, it requires a public education program to establish new confidence in the system, and maximize the ability and willingness of the public to respond appropriately to system warnings. PPW believes this public education task is too important to leave to general messages, even widely distributed. In order to usefully focus the public's attention and change attitudes and behavior, a link must be drawn at the local level between individuals and the public institutions involved. In other words, the campaign will become effective only as people see the system work in their communities and imagine themselves and those around them responding within the context of their daily lives.

As a means of forging this local link, the Partnership for Public Warning proposes that the President and Congress establish as an annual event a National Public Warning Awareness Day. On this day, national messages would reinforce local demonstration, testing and educational activities. Each community would test its public warning capabilities and distribute educational materials to residents about how they will receive information during an emergency situation. Targeted "dry runs", such as the evacuation of a middle school, or the set-up of an emergency medical facility, would be staged to test response to warnings and bring home to residents the seriousness of being prepared."

PPW proposes to coordinate the national campaign and provide promotional and educational materials that can be used by local communities. PPW would work with and assist local community emergency management officials and local community organizations such as the public library, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, etc.

PPW would also provide technical expertise and assistance to local communities seeking to improve their alert and warning capability. PPW would provide materials and criteria to be used by local officials in assessing the effectiveness of their alert and warning systems.

It is recommended that a national advisory board of national leaders and sponsoring organizations be established to work with PPW and to oversee and coordinate the establishment and management of this national day. This advisory board will recommend an appropriate day of each year to hold National Public Warning Awareness Day.