



Emergency Alerts: The Facts

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What is an Emergency Alert?

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is a national public warning system that allows authorized officials to disseminate urgent information during emergencies, such as severe weather events, natural disasters, or imminent threats.[1] There are various types of emergency alerts, several of which are distinguished by a specific color. For example, AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alerts help to find abducted children, Silver Alerts help locate missing adults, particularly seniors with mental impairments, and Blue Alerts assist in apprehending offenders who have seriously injured a law enforcement officer.[2][3][4] There are also state-specific emergency alerts. For instance, CLEAR Alerts are used for missing adults in dangerous situations in Texas, Purple Alerts are used for missing adults with cognitive disabilities in Florida, and Feather Alerts are used for missing Indigenous persons in California.[5][6][7]

Have You Heard?

- A prominent issue with emergency alerts is public awareness. Many adults only recognize a few emergency alerts, such as AMBER Alerts, which can impact attention to other important notifications, potentially limiting their effectiveness in critical situations.
- The Wireless Emergency Alerts system launched in 2012 and allows the delivery of geographically targeted messages to compatible mobile devices to alert users of imminent threats in their area.[1]
- Enhancing public education and awareness on emergency alerts is essential to ensuring swift and appropriate responses, ultimately improving public safety and the effectiveness of emergency communication.

What Are the Consequences?

The lack of awareness about emergency alerts has economic, social, and emotional impacts. Missed or misunderstood alerts can lead to substantial financial losses and a breakdown of trust within the community. Victims and their families experience emotional distress when responses are delayed. Ineffective alerts may be counterproductive, highlighting the need for better public education on emergency alert systems.[8][9]

How to Spread Awareness

To spread awareness about emergency alerts, it is best to use a multifaceted tactic that shares information via distinct channels, including advertising in public spaces and on TV, radio, and social media. Placing posters on public transportation and in schools can help inform people about how to sign up for alerts and why they are essential. Multimedia educational materials can explain the different types of alerts and how to respond once received. By making this information available and accessible, we ensure that the public remains informed and prepared—ultimately fostering a safer society.

Resources

Texas

- **AMBER Alert** -- <https://www.dps.texas.gov/news/new-law-makes-changes-amber-alert-system>
- **CLEAR Alert** -- <https://www.dps.texas.gov/section/intelligence-counterterrorism/clear-alert>
- **Endangered Missing Persons Alert** -- <https://www.dps.texas.gov/section/intelligence-counterterrorism/endangered-missing-persons-alert>

National

- **FEMA Emergency Alert System** -- <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/emergency-alert-system>
- **The Emergency Alert System** -- <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-alert-system>

References

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- [5]CLEAR Alert. (2019). Texas Department of Public Safety. <https://www.dps.texas.gov/section/intelligence-counterterrorism/clear-alert>
- [6]Florida's Purple Alert Plan. (2024). Florida Department of Law Enforcement. <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/PurpleAlerts/Purple-Alert-Plan.aspx>
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- [8]National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). "Understanding public response to alerts and warnings." Emergency alert and warning systems: Current knowledge and future research directions. National Academies Press.
- [9]Sadiq, A. A., Dougherty, R. B., Tyler, J., & Entress, R. (2023). Public alert and warning system literature review in the USA: Identifying research gaps and lessons for practice. *Natural Hazards*, 117(2), 1711-1744.

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Resources

- Aging and Disability Resource Center 855-937-2372
- Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 844-878-2274
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving 877-623-3435
- National Child Abuse Hotline 800-422-4453
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988
- Texas Abuse Hotline 800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/get-help/>
- Victim Connect Resource Center 855-484-2846