



STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Brian M. Satula
Administrator

Scott Walker
Governor

For more information contact: Tod Pritchard Office: 608-242-3324 Cell: 508-219-4008

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Emergency Alerts straight to your Cell Phone
Questions and Answers about the new service

(MADISON) – Local and State Emergency officials and the National Weather Service will have another tool for alerting the public to dangerous conditions - called Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA). These emergency alerts will be sent to newer cell phones in affected areas. Alerts will continue to be issued or available on other sources including radio/TV stations, on NOAA Weather Radios and local sirens.

Due to unforeseen connectivity issues, the rollout will be delayed until Wednesday June 27, 2012. Those issues are being solved right now but officials want extra time to test the new system.

Because this system is so new, people have many questions about how it works. Here are some commonly asked questions and answers.

1. What are WEA messages?

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are emergency messages sent by authorized government alerting authorities through your mobile carrier. Government partners include local and state public safety agencies, Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Communications Commission, the Department of Homeland Security and the National Weather Service.

2. Does WEA replace other warning systems?

No. WEA is not a replacement for other warning systems. It is part of the nation's larger warning network and is only intended to act as a bell ringer, so people should continue to rely on traditional sources for emergency information such as TV/radio, NWR, and community warning systems.

3. Why is this important to me?

Alerts received at the right time can help keep you and your family safe during an emergency. With WEA, alerts can be sent to your mobile device when you may be in harm's way.

4. How do I know if my phone will receive WEA messages?

The NWS is expected to send selected weather-related warnings to WEA-capable devices starting June 27, 2012. But many mobile devices, especially older ones, are not WEA-capable. When you buy a new mobile device, it probably will be able to receive WEA messages. For information about which mobile devices are WEA-capable, please visit <http://www.ctia.org/wea> or contact your wireless carrier.

5. Do I have to sign up for WEA service?

No, consumers will not have to sign up for WEA messages. They will be automatically broadcast to all cell phones with WEA capability in the warning area.

6. Do I have to download an app? No, you do not need to download an app or subscribe to a service.

7. Will I be charged for receiving WEA messages?

No. This service is offered for free by wireless carriers. WEA messages will not count towards texting limits on your wireless plan.

8. What types of alerts will I receive?

- Extreme / life threatening weather warnings
- Local emergencies requiring evacuation or immediate action
- AMBER Alerts
- Presidential Alerts during a national emergency

Of the 4 types of alerts, extreme weather warnings from the National Weather Service, by nature, will be the most frequent.

9. Does WEA know where I am? Is it tracking me?

No. WEA messages go to all the cell phone towers in the affected area. If your phone is receiving a signal from one of those towers you will get the message.

10. Will I receive a WEA message if I'm visiting an area where I don't live, or outside the area where my phone is registered?

Yes, if you have a WEA-capable phone and your wireless carrier participates in the program. For information about which mobile devices are WEA-capable and carrier participation, please visit <http://www.ctia.org/wea> or contact your wireless carrier.

11. What if I travel into a threat area after a WEA message is already sent?

If you travel into a threat area after an alert is first sent, your WEA-capable device will receive the message when you enter the area.

12. What does a WEA message look like?

WEA will look like a text message. The WEA message will show the type and time of the alert, any action you should take, and the agency issuing the alert. The message will be no more than 90 characters and is intended to be just a notification. Here are some examples:

- "Tornado Warning in this area until 2:15 PM. Take shelter now. –NWS"
- "Flash Flood Warning this area until 3:30 PM. Avoid flood areas. Check local media. – NWS"

13. How will I know the difference between WEA and a regular text message?

WEA messages include a special tone and vibration, both repeated twice.

14. What types of WEA messages will the National Weather Service send?

- Tornado and Flash Flood Warnings
- Blizzard and Ice Storm Warnings

Note: Until further notice, Severe Thunderstorm Warnings are not sent as a WEA message.

15. What should I do when I receive a WEA message?

Follow any action advised by the emergency message. Seek more details from local media or authorities.

16. Is this the same service public safety agencies have asked the public to register for?

No. Local agencies may have asked you to sign up to receive telephone calls, text messages, or e-mails. Example: Reverse 911. Those messages often include specific details about a critical event. WEA are very short messages designed to get your attention in an emergency situation. They may not give all the details you receive from other notification services.

17. How often is an individual WEA displayed?

Each WEA is displayed only once. However, cell carriers are planning on re-broadcasting the original WEA at certain intervals. The interval (could range from every 5 minutes to perhaps every 20 minutes depending on alert type).

18. Will a WEA message interrupt my phone conversations?

No, the alert will be delayed until you finish your voice or data session.

19. How often will I receive WEA messages?

You may receive frequent WEA messages during an emergency. Message frequency depends on the number of imminent threats to life or property in your area.

20. If, during an emergency, I can't make or receive calls or text messages due to network congestion, will I still be able to receive a WEA message?

Yes, WEA messages are not affected by network congestion.

21. What if I don't want to receive WEA messages?

You can opt-out of receiving WEA messages for imminent threats and AMBER alerts, but not for Presidential messages. To opt out, please refer to instructions from your wireless carrier or visit <http://www.ctia.org/wea> for more information.

22. How will I receive alerts if I don't have a WEA-capable device?

WEA is one of many ways you can receive emergency notifications. Other sources include NOAA Weather Radio, news media coverage, the Emergency Alert System on radio and TV broadcasts, social media, and other alerting methods offered by local and state public safety agencies. Your best use of WEA is to immediately seek additional information about the imminent threat impacting your area.

23. Are WEAs the same as text messages?

No. WEA are not the same as text messages. WEA will not have to be opened like SMS text messages, but will "pop up" on the device's screen.

24. Will there be a delay in my cell phone receiving a WEA due to congestion since cell phone usage goes up in areas experiencing severe weather?

No. Network congestion is not expected since each WEA is a radio broadcast rather than a text message (SMS).

For more information, go to <http://readywisconsin.wi.gov> and click on our "Cell Phone Alert" tab.

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