

Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) 2023 National Test FAQs

What is the purpose of the national test?

The national test will help ensure that Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) and the Emergency Alert System (EAS) continue to be effective ways to warn the public about emergencies, particularly those on the national level.

If the Oct. 4, 2023 test is postponed due to widespread severe weather or other significant events, the backup testing date is Oct. 11.

What must I do when I receive the national test?

No action is needed.

Why are you testing this system now?

Legislation passed in 2015 requires FEMA to conduct nationwide tests of IPAWS at least once every three years. The tests can include WEA, EAS and other alert and warning systems. The most recent national test was in 2021.

What will the national test display on my mobile phone?

“THIS IS A TEST of the National Wireless Emergency Alert System. No action is needed.” Phones set to Spanish will display: “ESTA ES UNA PRUEBA del Sistema Nacional de Alerta de Emergencia. No se necesita acción.”

The test will include tones and vibration to capture your attention.

What will the national test announce on TV and radio?

“This is a nationwide test of the Emergency Alert System, issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, covering the United States from 14:20 to 14:50 hours ET. This is only a test. No action is required by the public.”

How do I ensure that I receive the national test?

All major U.S. wireless providers participate in Wireless Emergency Alerts and will transmit the national test to their subscribers. If you have a WEA-compatible mobile phone that is on, within range of an active cell tower, and on a network where WEA is supported, you should receive the national test.

Wireless providers will transmit the national test for 30 minutes, but your phone should only receive it once. Some providers do not participate in WEA and will not transmit the national test. Some providers may participate in WEA on part of their network.

If your radio or TV is on and tuned to a broadcast station, a satellite radio or TV service or cable or wireless TV, it should receive the national test from the Emergency Alert System.



Is there a cost to receive the national test?

No.

Do I need to sign up to receive Wireless Emergency Alerts or the national test?

No sign-up, account or subscription is needed to receive WEA or the national test. Some local governments have their own mass-notification systems that require subscriptions.

Can the national test monitor, locate or lock my phone?

No.

Will the national test be used to gather my private data?

No. Both EAS and WEA are broadcast technologies and do not collect any of your data. This test is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the systems in sending an emergency message.

The FEMA Staff in the Technical Services Support Facility will send the national test message and will analyze system responses to see that the test message is received by the private sector network interfaces that in turn distribute the test message to cell phones and initiate broadcasts to radios and televisions. Because the technologies are broadcast, we don't have data on whether individual cell phones, radios or televisions actually receive a message.

What if I am on a phone call at the time of the national test?

The national test will not interrupt a phone call.

If there is an audible component to the WEA, will it override someone's phone set to silent/vibrate?

To receive a WEA message, your wireless phone or mobile device must be WEA-capable, switched on, and in the vicinity of and receiving service from a cell tower of a wireless service provider that participates in WEA. If you turn off the vibration or sound on your WEA-capable device, you may not feel the vibration or hear the attention signal of a WEA message.

I will be traveling away from home on Oct. 4. Will I still receive the national test?

If your mobile phone is on and receiving service from a participating wireless provider, you should receive the national test.

Can I opt-out of tests in my phone settings?

Recent models of mobile phones may include a setting to opt-out of tests and alerts. None of those settings will affect the 2023 national test. If your mobile phone is on and receiving service from a participating wireless provider, you should receive the national test.

I didn't receive the national test on my mobile phone. Why?

Only WEA-compatible phones that are switched on, not on 'airplane' mode, within range of an active cell tower, and on a network where the wireless provider participates in WEA will be capable of receiving the test message.

I realize people's phones will get the alert, but how do you do this?

FEMA staff in the IPAWS Technical Services Support Facility send alerts very similar to the way that more than 1,700 local, state, territorial, and tribal authorities use IPAWS to send alerts. There are multiple private sector alert origination tools that authorities can use to send alerts to IPAWS for distribution to cell phones as Wireless Emergency Alerts, EAS emergency broadcasts on TV and radio, and other emerging public communications systems that display emergency alerts.

Is there new equipment/software that needs to be tested or is this an annual thing now?

The IPAWS Modernization Act, 2015 (Public Law 114-143) requires FEMA to conduct nationwide tests of the public alert and warning system not less than once every three years. The previous national test was in 2021. The testing process is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the FEMA public alert and warning systems to distribute an emergency message nationwide and the operational readiness of the infrastructure for distribution of a national message to the public. Testing will ensure an effective and reliable system exists to provide timely and accurate alerts to the public and provide information to help determine whether technological improvements are needed.



Is there an illustration of what the text alert will look like?

See image at left.

Response to Rumors

Rumor: Cell phones will be inoperable during the test

There's no truth to these claims. The national test alert, or any alert issued via FEMA's IPAWS, will not make your phone or any other device 'inoperable.' The sole purpose of the test is to ensure that WEA and the EAS continue to be effective ways to warn the public about emergencies, particularly those on the national level. Both WEA and EAS use broadcast technologies and cannot collect any of your data.

Rumor: People will have to cancel or dismiss the alert to continue using their device and the alert sound for the whole 30 minutes

The specifics for phone behavior for WEA are defined by the wireless industry in specifications developed and maintained by the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS).

FEMA has observed that phone behavior can be slightly different among phone types. But generally:

- If the phone is off before the test alert is sent and not turned back on until after the WEA test message expires, the phone will not get the test message.
- The WEA alert tone is generally only played once when the alert is initially received by the phone and lasts only seconds. On some devices, tone will stop as soon as the user clicks a button.
- Phone operations are not disabled or interrupted when an alert is received or after the alert is dismissed by the phone operator.

Rumor: The alerts are harmful due to high frequency signals, activating graphene oxide and nanoparticles. These posts urge people to turn off their phones.

These posts are false. Although FEMA and the FCC do perform nationwide tests of the EAS and WEA, the sole purpose of the tests is to ensure that the systems continue to be an effective means of warning the public about emergencies, particularly those on the national level.

The EAS and WEA are critical tools used to warn the civilian population in areas endangered by natural disasters, acts of terrorism and other man-made disasters or threats to public safety. These alerts save lives and allow people to protect property when disasters strike, and the tests we perform with our partners at the FCC are intended to ensure that the systems are working properly.

The audio signal that will be used in the National Test is the same combination of audio tones that has been used since 1963 in the original Emergency Broadcast System. One of the reasons for using these tones for WEA messages is because of the public familiarity with the tones and association with emergency alerting.

The national test and tones will be the same as those sent by more than 1,700 local, state, territorial and tribal authorities who use IPAWS to send alerts. FEMA is not aware of any adverse health effects caused by the audio signal.