

TIP 38: Imminent Threat vs. Public Safety

The Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) enhancements of December 2019 included the addition of the Public Safety category to the list of WEA categories (i.e., WEA Handling Codes). There are now four categories of WEA available to Alerting Authorities: Imminent Threat, Public Safety, AMBER (with restriction), and WEA Test.

WEA Handling Codes are used for processing on the IPAWS side. Alerting Authorities can use the four categories listed above. Your alerting software will allow you to choose based upon selected event type.

What is an Imminent Threat Alert?

This alert type concerns an incident that poses a threat to preservation of life or property.

What is a Public Safety Alert?

This alert type concerns public safety situations (e.g. boil water, 911 telephone outage, etc.) It is not intended for life-threatening incidents where immediate action is necessary.

However, it must be understood that a public safety situation may escalate to Imminent Threat and officials must monitor the situation and update messaging as necessary.

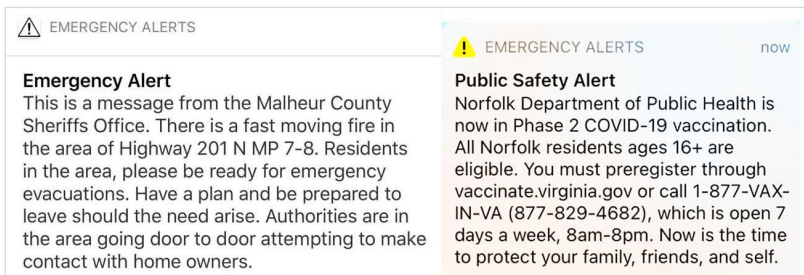
What Should I Send?

Points to consider when issuing a Public Safety Alert instead of an Imminent Threat Alert:

- Is the situation non-life threatening, but informing the public may be beneficial?
- Will the notification minimize public concern?
- Will the notification minimize impact on local call centers?

What's the Difference?

Simply put, the difference is in presentation on the cellular handset. What does that mean? Whether Imminent Threat or Public Safety, the alerts will transmit exactly the same through IPAWS. However, the WEA Emergency Alert banner will display differently. Imminent Threat alerts will display as “Emergency Alert” while Public Safety alerts will display the banner “Public Safety Alert.” See example images below.



What Are You Permitted to Send?

As an Alerting Authority your permissions are approved by your State Reviewing Official (Tribal Nations excepted). Your permissions are based on event code. For example, to be able to send a “Blue Alert” you must be approved for the Blue Alert event code. Your IPAWS Public Alerting Application can be updated at any time after state approval.

The decision regarding which WEA category (or Handling Type) to send relies upon local procedures and policies, and of course the circumstances.

All of the event codes that fall under the Imminent Threat or Public Safety category can be sent as an Imminent Threat alert or Public Safety message. For example, choosing “LAE Local Area Emergency” as your event code will let you be able to send as a Public Safety message or Imminent Threat alert.

Event Code	Event	WEA Handling Codes			
		Imminent Threat*	Public Safety*	Amber**	WEA Test***
AVW	Avalanche Warning	X	X		
CDW	Civil Danger Warning	X	X		
CEM	Civil Emergency Message	X	X		
EQW	Earthquake Warning	X	X		
EVI	Evacuation Immediate	X	X		
FRW	Fire Warning	X	X		
HMW	Hazardous Materials Warning	X	X		
LEW	Law Enforcement Warning	X	X		
NUW	Nuclear Power Plant Warning	X	X		
RHW	Radiological Hazard Warning	X	X		
SPW	Shelter In-place Warning	X	X		
VOW	Volcano Warning	X	X		
BLU	Blue Alert	X	X		
LAE	Local Area Emergency	X	X		
TOE	911 Telephone Outage Emergency	X	X		
CAE	Child Abduction Emergency			X	
RWT	Required Weekly Test				X
RMT	Required Monthly Test				X
DMO	Practice/Demo Warning				X

Caveats:

*These event codes can be Imminent Threat or Public Safety depending on situation and messaging purpose. The bold “X” is the recommended choice

**Child Abduction Emergency is restricted to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and approved State Agencies

***Recommend using Required Weekly Test (RWT) to perform WEA tests unless you have coordinated an RMT or DMO with your local broadcasters

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