How Tribal Nations Can Use the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to Save Lives

What is the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)?

IPAWS is FEMA's national online tool that Tribal leaders and officials can use to issue local alerts and warnings, such as Missing Persons or Public Health and Safety alerts, to their jurisdiction.

IPAWS gives Tribal Nations the ability to deliver a single alert simultaneously through multiple communication pathways, reaching as many people as possible to save lives and protect property. These communication pathways include:

- Wireless Emergency Alerts (cell phones)
- Emergency Alert System (radio and television)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Weather Radio
- Unique alerting systems (sirens, digital road signs, etc.)

How Can a Tribal Government Sign Up for IPAWS to Issue Alerts?

Step #1: Designate a Tribal Alerting Authority

Tribal leaders or elected officials will designate which members of their tribe are granted the authority to alert the public of emergency situations occurring in the tribe's jurisdiction. The designated tribal member(s) will be known as the Alerting Authority, serve as the IPAWS point of contact and issue the alerts. An Alerting Authority is also known as a Collaborative Operating Group or "COG."

Step #2: Complete IPAWS online training

To send an alert through IPAWS, the Alert Originator must complete the IS-247 - Integrated Public Alert and Warning System for Alert Originators course, offered online by the FEMA Emergency Management Institute. The online course takes about two hours to complete. It is a prerequisite for full access to IPAWS for the purpose of public alerting. The tribe's Alerting Authority will be required to submit a copy of the course completion certificate as part of the application process.

Step #3: Ensure alerting software is IPAWS-Compatible

To send a message, the tribe must purchase an alerting software tool that meets IPAWS requirements. Vendors of IPAWS-compatible alerting software are listed on the IPAWS website.

While there is no cost to send messages through IPAWS, there may be costs associated with acquiring compatible software. Funding may be available through the Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program to enhance existing alert and warning systems or to purchase new systems. Tribes may also want to consider sharing the cost of software and/or equipment with mutual aid organizations, neighboring jurisdictions or nearby public or private sector installations.

Step #4: Apply for a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with FEMA

To become a Collaborative Operating Group or "COG" authorized to send alerts through IPAWS, tribal governments must request a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with FEMA IPAWS. Each MOA is tailored to the requesting organization and their software system. To begin the MOA process, register for an account on the IPAWS User Portal, where you can submit your MOA Application. Once submitted, FEMA will prepare a custom MOA and send it to the Tribal leadership or officials for signature with a COG identification number.

Step #5 – Encourage cross-jurisdictional collaboration and apply for public alerting permissions

FEMA's Integrated Public Alert Warning Systems (IPAWS) Office recognizes the sovereign rights, authority and unique status of Tribal Nations, and we value the nation-to-nation agreement. As sovereign nations, Tribal Nations are not required to get state approval to send alerts, however we encourage cross jurisdictional collaboration to avoid over alerting or sending conflicting information. We are committed to working in partnership to support the unique cross-jurisdictional challenges of public alert and warning.

Alerting Authorities must complete an application indicating the types of alerts they intend to issue and their geographic area. The application can be submitted through the IPAWS User Portal. Once approved, all parties will receive a signed copy.

What's Next?

Once all the above steps have been completed, you will be notified by FEMA via e-mail that you are able to send alerts to the public. There are monthly proficiency requirements that Alerting Authorities must complete to demonstrate their ability to compose and send alerts through IPAWS. More information can be found under Resources for Alerting Authorities.

Technical Assistance

A point of contact from the FEMA IPAWS office will be assigned to assist you and answer questions throughout the application process.

For more information visit https://www.fema.gov/ipaws. Contact the IPAWS Office at ipaws@fema.dhs.gov.