

EMERGENCY ALERT AND WARNING ANNEX

Purpose

The purpose of this Annex is to facilitate the coordination of timely emergency information across departments, agencies, partners, and to the general public. This Annex is intended to define and address initial emergency messaging, or messaging that indicates an imminent threat to life safety and prompts the receiver to take action to the public and across county departments, as well as defining ongoing communication during a prolonged incident and how this differs from imminent threat alerts.

Scope

The provisions set forth in this Annex support the Larimer Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and applies to all county departments, offices, staff and elected officials.

Authorities:

- Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority (LETA) Intergovernmental Agreements, as revised
- Larimer County Emergency Management Resolution establishing the Office of Emergency Management and its authorities
- Larimer County Code, Disaster Preparedness
- Colorado Revised Statutes Title 24, Article 33.5 Section 7, Colorado Disaster Emergency Act
- Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, P.L. 93-288, as Amended
- Colorado Revised Statutes Title 20, Article 11, 104(D), Emergency Telephone Service

Assumptions

- If an incident occurs suddenly and the situation evolves rapidly, information may be incomplete or unconfirmed.
- While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the alert and notification systems the county uses, the successful delivery of messages is heavily dependent on external networks and providers outside the county's control.
- The county's emergency alert system is in addition to other alert systems used by neighboring jurisdictions, schools and universities, or other public or private organizations.
- Various factors can influence the public's response to an emergency message:
 - Interpretation of message – when different people listen to the same message, there may be a variation in what they hear or how they understand the message, leading to different interpretation and response.
 - Access and Functional Needs – such issues as cognitive function, access to technology, hearing ability, or language barriers may also prevent people receiving a message from understanding it fully, which can lead to different types of response to the message.

- Previous experiences – often people will rely on their previous experiences with the hazard to determine what actions they initially take (or don't take).
- Observations – individual responses to warnings vary, but most people will seek some form of confirmation. For example, some people will look for more information through environmental cues, while others will seek to contact other trusted sources.
- Trust – people who do not often have trusted relationships with government agencies, or communities who have been historically marginalized may not trust the official source of information and therefore seek confirmation from trusted networks as to the validity of the emergency, which could result in delayed action being taken
- Perception of risk/proximity – people tend to make a rapid assessment of the relative safety of their location. If their perception of personal risk is high, people will act quickly. If their perception is low, they may delay acting.
- Length of residency – tourists and newcomers to the area lack knowledge of local hazards and the history of local disasters, so they may react differently.

Situation

Effective emergency messaging requires communication of the nature, extent and expected impact of a hazardous incident as well as clear, concise and decisive information concerning appropriate protective measures. The timely and coordinated use of public warnings can reduce the impact of hazardous incidents.

To alert the greatest possible audience at risk in an emergency requires the use of multiple systems and methods to capture the public's immediate attention, regardless of their location or the time of day, and ensure important safety actions are communicated to all in the affected community. Each communication mode has different limitations. For example, some messages sent via social media have character limits. Most wireless carriers do not guarantee the timely delivery of text messages. The public's ability to receive voicemails and emails may be disrupted if the networks are compromised by outages or high traffic volumes. Additionally, a lack of infrastructure or infrastructure damage during an emergency event can impact the delivery of emergency alerts. For these reasons, Larimer County utilizes multiple emergency alert and warning systems to reach the greatest population possible.

Some incidents occur with enough warning that notification can be issued to ensure the appropriate level of preparation (i.e. winter weather, flood). Other incidents occur with little or no advanced warning and do not provide enough time to adequately notify the public (e.g., law enforcement event, earthquake, tornado, flash flood, fast-moving wildfire). As a hazard becomes known, and based on the circumstances and conditions that evolve, choices will be made to select:

- a. The best communications tools to use given the situation
- b. The appropriate message content
- c. The optimum format for each message
- d. The most effective times for releasing each message

The Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority (LETA) is the alerting authority in Larimer County and procures, trains, oversees, and manages the emergency alerting tools used by their partner agencies. Larimer County also relies on systems established through other partner agencies (i.e. National Weather Service) to initiate alerts regarding weather events.

Concept of Operations

The primary and support agencies to this Annex will act as a team to address emergency alerts and notification considerations to ensure the flow of information to departments, agencies and the public. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority and their authorized partner agencies are the lead in initiating emergency alerts and warning procedures for unincorporated Larimer County. Larimer OEM provides support through emergency notifications to partner agencies as appropriate.

- 1. General** - Timely and accurate emergency alerts to the public can prevent or reduce harm. The following principles of effective risk communication govern all alerts and warnings issued by Larimer County:
 - a. Message clarity – describe the hazard or threat in accessible and direct terms
 - b. Indicate intended audience – specify the geographic area or population affected by the alert
 - c. Specify actions – tell people what they should do to protect themselves and others. Some examples include evacuating, staying indoors, avoiding a certain area or monitoring news or other information
 - d. Acknowledge impacts – specify what damage has occurred or is expected to occur as a result of the incident
 - e. Describe the response – let people know what the county and its partners are doing to manage the incident and its impacts
 - f. Manage expectations – provide timely updates and “all clear” messages when appropriate to inform the public when it is safe to resume normal activities
- 2. Message Format** - When a hazard threatens public safety or creates a significant service disruption and an alert needs to be issued to the public, the Incident Commander (IC), LETA, or an authorized emergency alerting agency to determine the message content, geographic area to be covered, timing of message delivery, event duration, and appropriate emergency alert and warning tools.
- 3. Notifying Larimer OEM** - Larimer County relies on the lead response agencies or other partner agencies to initiate notification to Larimer OEM of an emergency. To help streamline notifications to OEM staff, the Larimer County Sheriff’s Office Dispatch Center has created a paging group to notify OEM personnel. Partner agencies should also notify Larimer OEM when a significant incident or event occurs that meets any one or more of the following criteria:
 - a. Continuity of Operations (COOP) – Any situation that significantly affects the county’s continuity of operations, i.e., the ability of the county to meet routine expectations or deliver essential services

- b. Duration – Any non-routine, unplanned incident expected to continue beyond a single operational period
 - c. Evacuations – Any event that prompts evacuations of any kind which is an activation trigger for the EOC due to the need for community support
 - d. Resources – Any situation that requires resources not provided by routine operational procedures or mutual aid
- Media Interest – Any incident that attracts significant media attention due to social, cultural, economic, political, technical or legal impacts (on staff or the public)

If the incident requires a coordinated multi-department or multi-agency response, Larimer OEM will determine whether to activate the Emergency Operations Center. Additional notification of the EOC activation level and staffing requirements will be sent to EOC personnel and the Policy Group. In a partial or full activation of the EOC, Larimer OEM will notify municipal and non-governmental partners.

Communication Tools There is a difference between emergency alerts and emergency information. Emergency alerts are issued when there is an imminent threat to life safety, and an action is required to ensure risk to receiver is minimized. Emergency information is any information that supports impacted individuals and helps them navigate the event. Some of the information shared during an emergency event includes sheltering information, resources for support, updated information on the incident, reunification, and closure of the incident. This distinction is important to understand and helps further define when to use the appropriate communication tools as listed below:

Alert Tools

a. Emergency Alerts – Everbridge System

- i. LETA's authorized users can initiate an emergency alert to residents, businesses, and tourists within Larimer County impacted by, or in danger of being impacted by, an emergency or significant incident. The emergency alert will reach individuals in a targeted area through landline, cell, text, keyword text, email, pager, and TTY/TDD. The public identifies these alerts as coming from "NOCOALERT".
- ii. Everbridge is updated monthly by LETA adding new/updated/deleted published and unpublished landline numbers from the 9-1-1 database. LETA also adds some voice over internet numbers. All contact information is geocoded to the primary address point and is loaded in the Everbridge System. Citizens can also register their cell phones / text / email to receive emergency alerts to their mobile devices.
- iii. For citizens that do not want to create an account in the Everbridge system, LETA offers a keyword text alert. Citizens / tourist / visitors / can receive emergency alerts for any emergency in Larimer County by texting the word NOCOALERT to 888777.

- iv. Everbridge use is limited to imminent threats to life that require the public to take action (e.g. evacuate or stay indoors). Messaging that does not require immediate public action should be disseminated via press releases, social media, and other non-emergent channels.
- v. Everbridge provides a GIS interface that allows the authorized user to draw a polygon to define the impacted area and limit notification to that specific area.
- vi. Sending an emergency alert to the public requires an identification that an imminent threat to life requires the public to act. Once the incident commander makes that determination, any of LETA's authorized emergency alert users may send the public facing emergency alert. Typically, the authorized user that works at the same jurisdiction as the IC sends the alert however there are times that LETA modifies who is authorized to send public facing alerts during an emergency incident. For example, if an emergency incident travels across jurisdictions, LETA will determine who is better suited to send the emergency alerts and will work with the incident commander accordingly.

b. Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)

- i. IPAWS provides public safety officials with an effective way to alert and warn the public about serious emergencies using the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA Weather Radio), and other public alerting systems from a single interface through Everbridge.
- ii. IPAWS alerts should be considered, in conjunction with Everbridge alerts, for large-scale emergencies, rapidly escalating events, compromised infrastructure, etc.
- iii. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority is an approved Collaborative Operating Group (COG) with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and utilizes Everbridge to integrate with IPAWS-OPEN.
- iv. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority has two staff members authorized to send IPAWS alerts., Requirements for sending IPAWS alerts include: IS-247a FEMA certification, completion of monthly test alerts, and be an authorized user of the Everbridge system.
 - 1. IPAWS WEA Alerts through Everbridge
 - a. WEA allows geographically targeted text-like alerts to be delivered directly to WEA-enabled mobile devices. The public does not need to sign up for this service; however, successful notification requires a WEA-enabled mobile device and participation by the wireless provider in WEA.
 - b. WEA uses a unique tone and vibration to signal that an alert has arrived – this is particularly helpful to people with hearing or vision-related disabilities.

- c. WEA alerts are limited to 360 characters per message typically alerting the recipient of the type of event and recommended protective action (e.g. stay indoors, evacuate). To get more specific information the public will be directed to a website, local news or other source of information via WEA.
 - d. WEA alerts are also issued by NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS) for imminent and severe weather conditions (e.g. tornado, blizzard warnings), as well as non-emergency alerts in or near the county.
 - e. WEA is intended to complement the EAS, which sends warnings to broadcast and satellite television and radio in the affected area.
2. IPAWS EAS Alerts through Everbridge
 - a. EAS is used to send warnings via broadcast, cable, satellite, and wireline communications pathways.
 - b. EAS participants, which consist of broadcast, cable, satellite and wireless providers, are required to send national alerts.
 - c. Broadcasters and cable operators participate in the local-level EAS on a **voluntary** basis.

Emergency Information Tools

a. Website: larimer.org/emergency

- i. When a significant incident occurs, Larimer County has the ability to post informational messages to the public within Everbridge that will automatically be sent to the Larimer OEM webpage, www.larimer.org/emergency. In some instances, this information will also be sent by Larimer OEM and the LCSO to social media accounts. Typically, the LCSO is responsible for posting information to the public through this mechanism.
- ii. When an incident presents an unusual threat or requires additional attention, the OEM Director or the LCSO PIO may post detailed information as a static banner at the top of the Larimer County homepage.
- iii. During a prolonged incident with regional impact, an incident-specific website will be stood up to help direct community member information. There is the chance for multiple incidents to occur at the same time, so having clarity for the public on where information for incidents can be found is critical.

b. Social Media

- i. Emergency Managers, Responders and PIOs use social media accounts to make information quickly accessible to a wide, highly mobile and interconnected public. None of these accounts are monitored 24 hours a day nor are considered a primary means of informing the public. However, social media accounts have proven to be an effective adjunct to other alerting systems. Additionally, social media is a form of two-way communication, not just an outbound channel.
- ii. For rural parts of Larimer County, NextDoor has also been a tool that has been utilized for sharing information. However, NextDoor is a one-way feedback

mechanism, meaning that the posting agency cannot see community-level chatter, which makes this a difficult platform to manage rumors and misinformation. Therefore it is only utilized to post information and updates but is not used to engage with the community.

- iii. Emergency alerts sent through the Everbridge system will automatically be posted to the Facebook and X accounts of Larimer OEM and Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority.

c. Media Releases

- i. The lead PIO for the incident will issue media releases (in coordination with other county departments and the Joint Information Center) to advise the public of planned events, service disruptions, the appropriate response to ongoing situations, and update the status of response and coordination activities following a significant incident.
- ii. Information contained in a media release is typically posted to the Larimer County website and disseminated via social media, Everbridge informational alerts and/or other means.
- iii. Media releases are not used as the primary means of communicating urgent warnings about life threatening situations.

d. Door-to-Door Notifications

- i. In the event of a significant or catastrophic telecommunications disruption, or the inability to communicate emergency information via means described in this Annex – law enforcement, fire, EMS and public works personnel may disseminate emergency information via roaming loudspeakers in emergency response vehicles or via door-to-door notifications.

Roles and Responsibilities

a. Larimer County Sheriff's Office

- i. LCSO Communications Center – Is the county's Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). LCSO Communications Center will notify the LCSO Emergency Operations Manager by SMS text via pager and/or mobile device if any of the following occur:
 - 1. Significant incidents or disasters involving or affecting Larimer County emergency services resources.
 - 2. Severe weather warnings issued by the National Weather Service, or state and national warnings received over the NAWAS for Larimer County.
- ii. LCSO Emergency Services Liaison or Incident Commander – Provides situational awareness regarding events and incidents in Larimer County, provides incident management support, and notifies Larimer OEM in the event of a significant event in the county.

- iii. LCSO Public Information Officer – Work in coordination with the Emergency Services Liaison or Incident Commander to provide public information and updates regarding significant events in Larimer County.

b. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority

- i. Provide oversight of the county's emergency alert systems, including the authorization and appropriation of resources necessary to establish and maintain emergency alert and warning systems.
- ii. Provide support to the JIC and EOC as appropriate during and after significant events in Larimer County. This also includes support fielding questions from the public and troubleshooting issues with community member's ability to receive alerts. Additionally, LETA collects information for persons who may need extra assistance in an incident, such as those who have access and functional needs that affect their ability to evacuate on their own. LETA can provide this information to the EOC to help with planning purposes and so that the EOC can coordinate support for persons experiencing this situation.

c. Larimer County

- i. Larimer County Office of Emergency Management
 - 1. Provide general oversight of the county's emergency management programs, including maintenance of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
 - 2. Advise the Policy Group concerning emergency management needs before, during, and after an emergency
 - 3. Maintain the EOC, which helps facilitate coordination among municipal and county partners and outside agencies
 - 4. Coordinate with the LCSO Communications Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and LCSO PIO to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
- ii. Board of County Commissioners
 - 1. Ensure availability to make critical decisions following a large-scale emergency or disaster.
 - 2. In consultation with the County Manager, execute the major emergency or disaster declaration as appropriate.
- iii. County Public Relations Manager
 - 1. Coordinate with the LCSO Communications Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, LCSO PIO, LETA, and other emergency response public information partners involved in the incident to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
 - 2. Provide support to the JIC and EOC as appropriate and requested

Resource Requirements

Resources needed to support the effective operations under this Annex are addressed in Standard Operating Procedures developed and maintained by each Primary and Support Agency.

Annex Development and Maintenance

The Larimer Office of Emergency Management is responsible for developing and maintaining this annex. Larimer OEM will seek guidance from primary and support agencies for any changes or updates. This annex will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to remain current.

References:

- Larimer Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, 2015
- Wireless Emergency Alerts, Federal Communications Commission, <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/wireless-emergency-alerts-wea>
- Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority, www.leta911.org
- Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, Federal Emergency Management Agency, <https://www.fema.gov/integrated-public-alert-warning-system>
- National Warning System Operations Manual, Federal Emergency Management Agency, http://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/1550_2.pdf

APPROVAL SIGNATURES

The Emergency Alert and Warning Annex has hereby been reviewed and approved by the Director for the Larimer County Office of Emergency Management this 3rd day of March, 2025, and will be added to the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan for Larimer County.

BY:  _____
Lori R. Hodges, Director Office of Emergency Management