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New Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)

For the upcoming storm season, the National Weather Service (NWS) has implemented a new alerting tool that sends warning text messages to enabled smart phones. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) will be delivered to targeted areas within an NWS-issued Tornado Warning or Flash Flood Warning. As with other alerting systems, such as the Emergency Alert System (EAS), there will be instances of bleed over to areas not included in the warning area and we urge the community to seek information from local media outlets when alerted by WEA. In addition to extreme weather alerts (Tornado Warning and Flash Flood Warning), authorities can disseminate warnings for AMBER alerts and Presidential alerts.

All major cell phone carriers are participating in WEA and each WEA-enabled smart phone has the ability to opt-out of emergency/imminent alerts and AMBER alerts, at the risk of missing important warnings in the future. Unlike weather radios, where only a small portion of the public ever keeps them ready to alert, over 90% of the population has cell phones, meaning a greater number of people will now receive Tornado and Flash Flood warnings.

The city of Plano does not control the WEA program and the alerts are not sent by the City's mass notification system. If the community has questions about opting out of the system they should be directed to their cell phone carrier for assistance.

The following links provide additional information about WEA:

<http://www.fema.gov/wireless-emergency-alerts>

<http://www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/consumer-tips/wireless-emergency-alerts>

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) important to me?

Alerts received at the right time can help keep you safe during an emergency. With WEA, warnings can be sent to your mobile device when you may be in harm's way, without need to download an app or subscribe to a service.

2. What are WEA messages?

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are emergency messages sent by authorized government alerting authorities through your mobile carrier.

3. What types of alerts will I receive?

- Extreme weather, and other threatening emergencies in your area
- AMBER Alerts

- Presidential Alerts during a national emergency

4. 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.

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

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

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

- Tsunami Warnings
- Tornado and Flash Flood Warnings
- Hurricane, Typhoon, Dust Storm and Extreme Wind Warnings

7. What are AMBER Alerts?

AMBER Alerts are urgent bulletins issued in the most serious child-abduction cases. The America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert Program is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and the wireless industry.

8. Who will send WEAs to issue AMBER Alerts?

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), in coordination with State and Local public safety officials, sends out AMBER Wireless Emergency Alerts through IPAWS.

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

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

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. (More than 100 carriers, including all of the largest carriers, do.)

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. When will I start receiving WEA messages?

It depends. WEA capabilities were available beginning in April 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.

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

No, but they are complementary. Local agencies may have asked you to sign up to receive telephone calls, text messages, or emails. Those messages often include specific details about a critical event. WEAs are very short messages designed to get your attention in a critical situation. They may not give all the details you receive from other notification services.

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15. 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.

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

No. Just like emergency weather alerts you see on local TV, WEAs are broadcast from area cell towers to mobile devices in the area. Every WEA-capable phone within range receives the message, just like TV that shows the emergency weather alert if it is turned on. But, the TV stations, like WEA, don't know exactly who is tuned in.

17. Will a WEA message interrupt my phone conversations?

No, the alert will be delayed until you finish your call.

18. How often will I receive WEA messages?

You may get very few WEA messages, or you may receive frequent messages when conditions change during an emergency. The number of messages depends on the number of imminent threats to life or property in your area.

19. 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.

20. 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, adjust settings on your mobile device.

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

WEA is only one of the ways you receive emergency alerts. Other sources include NOAA Weather Radio, news broadcasts, the Emergency Alert System on radio and TV programs, outdoor sirens, and other alerting methods offered by local and state public safety agencies.