

Australian Capital Territory

Emergencies (Emergency Alert) Commissioner's Guidelines 2012

Notifiable Instrument NI2012 – 19

made under the

Emergencies Act 2004, s 11 (Commissioner may make guidelines).

1. Name of Instrument

This instrument is the *Emergencies (Emergency Alert) Commissioner's Guidelines 2012*.

2. Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after it is notified.

3. Commissioner's Guidelines

I make the Commissioner's Guidelines at Schedule 1 to this instrument relating to

THE USE OF EMERGENCY ALERT BY THE A.C.T. EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCY

for the strategic operation of each of the emergency services.

Mark Crossweller AFSM FAIM
Emergency Services Commissioner
3 January 2012

Schedule 1

ACT EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCY

COMMISSIONER'S GUIDELINES

relating to

**the Use of Emergency Alert by the
ACT Emergency Services Agency**

January 2012

1. PURPOSE

To provide Commissioner's guidelines to describe the internal ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) processes for using the Emergency Alert system and to provide a framework for the issuing of messages via the system in an emergency.

These guidelines are made in accordance with the *Emergencies Act 2004*.

2. BACKGROUND

- a. Under the *Emergencies Act 2004*, the Emergency Services Commissioner has the responsibility to emphasise the importance of communicating information, advice and warnings to the community during an emergency and is also responsible for community education and improving community preparedness for emergencies.

3. SYSTEM CAPABILITIES

- a. Emergency Alert provides the capability to send warning messages to individuals within a particular area. Each use of the system is known as a Campaign.
- b. Messages will:
 - i. warn targeted areas of the ACT community of imminent and severe threats from emergency incidents; and
 - ii. direct those warned to other sources of information and/or direct them to move away from an imminent hazard or threat.
- c. The system will:
 - i. define an emergency incident area on a map, known as a Campaign Area, by utilising a Geographic Information System (GIS) product to locate and draw the incident area polygon;
 - ii. identify the phone services located within that polygon area by querying the Location Based Number Store;
 - iii. send a voice message of up to 35 seconds in duration to all identified landline telephone services. Longer messages can be sent but will cost more and may degrade the message delivery time;
 - iv. send a text message of up to 160 characters to all identified mobile phone services; and
 - v. report on the delivery of these messages.

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4.1 Principles of Use for Emergency Alert

- a. The principles for the use of Emergency Alert are at Attachment A.

4.2 Authorised Officers

- a. The Lead Response Agency Incident Controller will be responsible for determining the need for issuing warnings and the decision to undertake an Emergency Alert Campaign.
- b. The Lead Response Agency Incident Controller has overall responsibility for all aspects of the Emergency Alert campaign, including:
 - i. liaising with the Nominated Operator (refer Attachment B) and authorising the release of the campaign;
 - ii. management of warning consequences arrangements (refer 4.5 below); and
 - iii. ensuring that the principles have been complied with.
- c. In undertaking these functions, the Incident Controller will be supported by the Nominated Operators and identified Service Senior Officers (refer Attachment C).

4.3 Campaign Decision and Authorisation Process – Incident Controller

- a. The Incident Controller shall consider a range of factors in deciding whether to issue public warnings for incidents, including:
 - i. type of emergency and available information;
 - ii. potential impact and threat to lives and livelihood;
 - iii. urgency and time critical factors relevant to the issuing of warnings; and
 - iv. the likely community behaviour and perceptions.
- b. Once aware that an event requires a warning to be passed to the community, the Incident Controller:
 - i. considers the most appropriate warning mechanism. Emergency Alert is used as one element in a suite of existing mediums for community information and warning notifications. Complementary warning mediums include:
 1. broadcast media (radio / television-based);
 2. online, including websites and social media;
 3. person-to-person notification; and
 4. Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS).

- c. If the decision is to use Emergency Alert, a Campaign will be undertaken and the following guidelines apply:
 - i. The Incident Controller will contact the Emergency Management Duty Officer who will activate a Nominated Operator from positions identified within the ESA (refer Attachment B). In general it is anticipated that a Nominated Operator from the non-lead response agency will undertake this function.
 - ii. In other circumstances, a Nominated Operator may be activated and available for use on a pre-emptive arrangement based on identified risk factors, such as elevated fire danger conditions or potential flooding. Activation on this basis will be through the Emergency Management Duty Officer.
- d. Following activation of a Nominated Operator, the Incident Controller will advise a Service Senior Officer (refer Attachment C) of the decision to use Emergency Alert and the need to activate consequence management arrangements (refer 3.5 below).
- e. During the Campaign the Incident Controller, with the support of the Nominated Operator and the Service Senior Officer, oversees Campaign progress and requirement for follow up decision making.
- f. Operational procedures for the Incident Controller during an Emergency Alert campaign are at (Attachment D).

4.4 Campaign Implementation Process – Nominated Operator

- a. Operational procedures for the Nominated Operator to undertake an Emergency Alert campaign are at (Attachment D).

4.5 Management of Warning Consequences

- a. The management of the consequences of an Emergency Alert Campaign must start with the initial decision to use the system and must run concurrently with the decision, authorising and campaign implementation process.
- b. The Service Senior Officer has responsibility for coordinating consequence management measures. Consequence management measures will be event-dependent but will include those actions identified at (Attachment D).

4.6 Monitoring

- a. Once an Emergency Alert message has been released to a campaign area, real-time monitoring must be implemented. There are two aspects that require attention.
 - i. monitoring the transmission of the warning. This will be provided through Emergency Alert system tools by the Nominated Operator.
 - ii. monitoring the effectiveness of the warnings. This must be done from reports on community reaction to the warning. A number of tools can be used to track this such as:
 1. feedback from those involved in the incident; and
 2. feedback from the Public Information Coordination Centre (PICC) from the monitoring of open source media reports and social networking services.
- b. Reports on this monitoring will be fed back to the Incident Controller and Service Senior Officer in order to facilitate further warning message decisions.

4.7 Closure

- a. In consultation with the Incident Controller, the PICC will engage with external media outlets to ensure that the community is clearly advised when the threat has eased or ended. Agencies should be mindful of the wording of the message as there may be residual sensitivities within the community as a result of the emergency.

4.8 Governance arrangements for Emergency Alert

- a. The ESA Commissioner's Internal Operations Group will be the ESA forum for internal oversight, reporting and policy arrangements for the use of Emergency Alert.
- b. Management of the Emergency Alert system and infrastructure related to the ACT will be undertaken by the ESA, who will be responsible for :
 - i. coordinating and managing policies dealing with the use of Emergency Alert in ACT;
 - ii. reviewing this guideline and its associated procedures annually. Following the implementation and testing of Emergency Alert, there may be a requirement to conduct a review earlier;
 - iii. maintenance, testing and capture of Emergency Alert costs including measures for accountability and cost;
 - iv. training and rostering (as appropriate) of Operators; and
 - v. record-keeping and reporting.

4.9 Training

- a. Ongoing training (utilising the *Emergency Alert – Recommended Use Guide*) and familiarisation on the use of the system will be provided to Nominated Operators on the use of this system by the ESA.
- b. Services will commit to ensure that Nominated Operators are available to undertake training to maintain appropriate capability and familiarity of the system.

Dictionary:

Note 1 The *Emergencies Act 2004* and the *Legislation Act 2001* contain definitions and other provisions relevant to this Guideline.

Attachment A

Principles for the Use of Emergency Alert in the ACT ESA

- a. Emergency Alert is a component of an integrated and comprehensive public warning methodology and will not be used as a standalone warning measure.
- b. Traditional warning mechanisms such as door knocking, use of the broadcast media, social media and internet and the use of the Standard Emergency Warning System (SEWS) will continue to be used in the ACT to warn communities in danger.
- c. Emergency Alert may be used if there is an emergency and communities need to be warned.
- d. During certain situations, for example where the immediate provision of warnings to members of the community is required, the issuing of warnings using Emergency Alert may not always be possible, and the community should not rely on an Emergency Alert warning being issued in all circumstances.
- e. Emergency Alert does not replace individual and community preparedness for an emergency.
- f. Emergency Alert messages will direct the community to official information sources on which to act.
- g. Agencies issuing emergency warnings must consider the consequences of the warnings, including the intended community response to the warning.
- h. Agencies shall have arrangements in place to accommodate outcomes, e.g. updating information available on official websites and arranging for the rostering of additional resources to manage increased call volume.
- i. Acknowledge an Emergency Alert warning may have an impact on 000 and Canberra Connect. A process for advising ComCen, Canberra Connect, Service Duty Officers and Duty Public Information Officer following the issue of an Emergency Alert message must be considered.
- j. Other directorates may need to be involved in consequence management processes associated with the use of Emergency Alert, particularly when the use includes the relocation of sections of the population.
- k. When the risk of the emergency reaches an acceptable or manageable level the community should be notified. It is an option to use an Emergency Alert message to close an incident; however, it may be a more efficient use of resources to use other methods for closing an incident with a community which has received a message via Emergency Alert.

Attachment B

Nominated Operators

A Nominated Operator will be available to support an Emergency Alert Campaign at all times. In liaison with the emergency services, the ESA Emergency Management Officer is responsible for maintaining the register of Nominated Operators, establishing arrangements for the availability and callout of Nominated Operators and the provision of necessary equipment, training and documentation to undertake their functions.

Details of Nominated Operators will be maintained and regularly reviewed by the ESA.

Attachment C

Service Senior Officer

In liaison with the emergency services, the ESA Emergency Management Officer will establish arrangements for the awareness training and documentation to support Service Senior Officers in undertaking their functions.

ACT Fire and Rescue	ACT Rural Fire Service	ACT Ambulance Service	ACT State Emergency Service
Chief Officer	Chief Officer	Chief Officer	Chief Officer
Deputy Chief Officer	Deputy Chief Officer	Deputy Chief Officer	Deputy Chief Officer
Superintendents	Superintendents	General Managers	

Attachment D – Operational Procedures

Campaign Authorisation - Incident Controller

Following the decision to use Emergency Alert:

- i. define the campaign area (polygon) to the Nominated Operator;
- ii. confirm the campaign area entered into Emergency Alert – this can be emailed by the Operator to the Incident Controller;
- iii. confirm that the audio and SMS messages are suitable to the operational situation, are grammatically correct, have the correct spelling and contain relevant information; and
- iv. authorise the Nominated Operator to commence the Campaign.

Campaign Implementation - Nominated Operator

On activation and in liaison with the Incident Controller, the Nominated Operator:

- i. logs on to Emergency Alert, identifies the area at appropriate resolution and draws the campaign polygon or imports a pre-defined area created in a recognised Emergency Alert file format, or enters coordinates to form a polygon (ideally, the polygon should be kept as simple as possible by limiting the number of points on the map);
- ii. selects and constructs the message based on ACT ESA Emergency Alert guidelines at ([Attachment E](#));
- iii. considers performance factors (refer [Attachment F](#)), including increasing the Validity Period (default 30 minutes) if required based on fixed line delivery of 1,000 messages per minute;
- iv. confirms polygon area and message content with the Incident Controller;
- v. submits the campaign;
- vi. requests Incident Controller to confirm in writing that the Campaign can be released;
- vii. enters password to initiate Campaign release;
- viii. monitors progress of the Campaign and advises Incident Controller; and
- ix. provides details of messages to the Public Information Coordination Centre (PICC) as required.

The *Emergency Alert – Recommended Use Guide* provides detailed information on the use of system for operators.

Depending on the timing of the incident, the Nominated Officer may initially activate Emergency Alert messaging from a remote location. If required, the Nominated Operator may subsequently attend a relevant emergency services worksite, including at a forward control point if necessary.

The Emergency Alert Help Desk provides for 24/7 support in the operation of the system and should be contacted by the Nominated Operator if difficulties arise.

Management of Warning Consequences –Service Senior Officer

The Service Senior Officer has responsibility for coordinating consequence management measures. Consequence management measures will be event-dependent but will include:

- i. informing key personnel of its use, including notification to the Chief Officer of the Lead Response Agency, who will in turn notify the Emergency Services Commissioner.
- ii. activation of the Public Information Coordination Centre (PICC) on behalf of the Incident Controller (if not already activated). The PICC will ensure the community is provided appropriate advice and messaging associated with the Emergency Alert. This may include:
 1. uploading websites with relevant information and alert the media consistent with existing processes;
 2. provision of advice to Canberra Connect and potential of call surges; and
 3. preparing advice as appropriate when an Emergency Alert has ended.

Attachment E

Message Construction and Templates

Warnings are intended to achieve two distinct outcomes – to inform the community of an impending or current threat, and to promote appropriate actions. Agencies need to be very clear about whether they need to achieve one or both of these outcomes when drafting a warning.

Messages should be worded to prompt appropriate community response and/or action.

Warning content and format must:

- a. be simple, arresting and brief;
- b. be suited to the needs of the community;
- c. be worded in accordance with advice from the relevant agencies; and
- d. utilise appropriate templates.

Warnings should reflect the principles outlined in the Commonwealth policy paper *Emergency Warnings – Choosing Your Words (2008)*.

The ACT ESA has pre-planned message templates that comply with the National Guidelines and the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) to assist in the timely development and dissemination of warnings to the community.

The ESA Media and Community Information Unit has responsibility for advising in the content and construction of message templates.

Voice Message to Landlines

Messages should preferably be no longer than 35 seconds in total, as further charges will apply to every call for each additional 35 seconds or part thereof.

Messages should be structured as above and provided as typed text in phonetic layout to enable automated voice messaging. They should be no more than 450 characters (including spaces), as this equates to a 31 second length, which allows for the four second SEWS tone at the start of the message. However, the system does allow for a maximum length of 4000 characters but this would be the equivalent of nine messages and take over five minutes to deliver.

Emergency Alert also allows the choice of male or female voices. In making the choice, Users should consider that, in general, reassurance is better delivered by a female voice, whilst a call to action comes better from a male voice.

SMS Message to Mobiles

As these Campaign messages are limited to 160 characters including spaces, great care must be taken to ensure that abbreviations are kept to a minimum to avoid confusion but the message still informs the individuals of a particular danger and states an action that is required to be done without delay.

SMS messages are also provided in typed text (however no phonetic text as for voice messages. SMS messages will be delivered as typed).

To ensure timely heeding of warnings by the general public, they must recognise the initiating agency as being a credible organisation.

Attachment F

Performance Considerations

Emergency Alert's performance will be affected by a number of factors:

- the number of Campaigns that are initiated and running at any one time;
- the number of Users or Administrators logged on the Emergency Alert system;
- the volume and number of fixed line and mobile services that will be sent a Campaign message;
- the complexity of GIS Shapes that are defined and confirmed by Operator;
- the number of queries to the Location Based Number Store (LBNS) which are performed (note: each time a polygon is confirmed, a query to LBNS is performed);
- the number and size of reports that are being requested from the Emergency Alert Application;
- the amount of any photographic/satellite views that are used in the maps and the frequency at which users zoom in and out of maps;
- the length of the message to be sent to fixed line services;
- the length of the SMS message to be sent to mobile services i.e. a maximum of 160 characters;
- the Campaign Validity Time;
- the time taken to authorise a Campaign;
- in commercial and industrial areas, the use of Private Automatic Exchanges (PABX) may significantly increase the number of fixed lines identified through the LBNS;
- the occurrence of "historical" numbers, where details have not been updated or disconnected, particularly if the target covers a telephone exchange; and
- the number of times a user utilises the speech translation preview function and time it takes to validate that message.

Other factors affecting performance that should be considered by Users include:

- the priority assigned to each Campaign. A Warning message will have a higher priority than other message types, such as those for information and advice;
- the number of failed messages to fixed line services (including where the service is busy, there is no answer, answered by an answering machine and where the service is a fax machine or telemetry device);
- whether messages are to be delivered to fixed line services, mobile services or both;

- the number of fixed line congestion events which are detected during a Campaign;
- whether there is extremely high use of the SMS network by the general public at certain key times and dates (for example, around midnight on New Year's Eve, Christmas Day, Mother's Day and where there are major events being held in a particular location);
- the likelihood of a Campaign Area experiencing high usage of the network due to an existing emergency, event or incident, which will be increased by the targeted sending of emergency warning messages from the Emergency Alert Application;
- in areas where there is poor mobile coverage and a power failure occurs, warning messages can only be received by people with access to a landline phone with a cord; i.e. not a cordless phone nor a combined phone/fax machine; and
- Telstra has no control over the performance of other carrier's networks.