GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR WISCONSIN COUNTIES CONDUCTING IPAWS TESTING

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Issued by Wisconsin EAS Committee (State Emergency Communications Committee)

For updates to this guidance document, check Wisconsin Emergency Alert System (EAS) webpage at: www.sbe24.org/eas/CountyIPAWStesting.asp

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I. INTRODUCTION

This guidance document was created by the Wisconsin EAS Committee to assist Wisconsin counties in conducting tests of their alerting capabilities via FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS).

This document is for use by counties that are already up and running on IPAWS. If your county has not yet acquired IPAWS alert origination software, completed the FEMA authorization process and received a Collaborative Operating Group (COG) ID, then you must first complete that FEMA process before IPAWS testing can be conducted. For more information, see: www.fema.gov/ipaws. Current contact information for IPAWS alerting in Wisconsin can be obtained from FEMA at: ipaws@fema.dhs.gov, or 202-212-2040.

II. IPAWS EAS TESTING

Wisconsin counties are encouraged to conduct regular weekly or monthly IPAWS EAS tests for the acuity of their alerting staffs, as well as the awareness of broadcasters and cable operators who receive these tests that the county has IPAWS alerting capabilities.

IPAWS EAS tests will not be broadcast on the air by broadcast stations or cable systems. The tests will merely be printed out on the broadcast or cable facility's EAS unit log.

A. Preparing for IPAWS EAS Testing

Day-of-Week and Time: The County will need to choose a repetition rate (weekly or monthly), the day of the week, and the time. The Wisconsin EAS Committee requests that counties not schedule their test at the exact same time as a time already being used by another county in their area. Please pick a test time not already in use on the list "County IPAWS Test Times", on this webpage of the Wisconsin EAS Committee: www.sbe24.org/eas/CountyIPAWStesting.asp

Use of Templates: The County may wish to create an EAS Test template within their IPAWS origination software for ease in calling up the test each time it is used.

Establish a Relationship with a Broadcaster in your County: In order to verify that your test was successful, before beginning testing you should establish a relationship with a broadcaster in your county. After each test, you can contact that broadcaster to be sure your test was received. The person to search out at these stations is the Chief Engineer, who maintains the EAS unit.

B. Software Selections for the IPAWS EAS Test message

Event Code: The Event Code you must use for all EAS tests is "RWT - Required Weekly Test", regardless if you are doing your test weekly or monthly. *(Never use the RMT-Required Monthly Test code, as this test would be aired immediately by all broadcasters. If your software is set up properly, the RMT code should not be available to you – but if you do see it, don't use it.)*

Time Duration: This setting is not critical, but most users set it for 15 minutes.

Message Status: This field should be set to "Actual", not "Test" or "Exercise". (Some software does not offer this selection, but simply sends all messages in "Actual" status.)

Use "Live" Operational Mode: Most IPAWS origination software has two modes, a "Test" mode and a "Live" mode (the actual terms describing these modes in your software may vary). In "Test" mode, messages are only sent to an off-line FEMA test lab allowing you to practice without those messages going out over IPAWS. In "Live" mode, messages are actually sent out on the IPAWS system. This IPAWS EAS test you are conducting should be sent in the real "Live" mode (not "Test" mode). Sending in the "Live" mode, and selecting "Actual" in the step above, will allow your test to be received by broadcasters and cable operators.

If you are unsure of any of these settings, consult your alert origination software vendor support.

C. Text included in the IPAWS EAS Test message

You will need to include text in your IPAWS EAS test message. There are three fields that can contain text in an IPAWS message: Headline, Description, and Instruction.

Headline text field: In a real alert, this would be a short title, like "Toxic Chemical Spill in Downtown Milwaukee". This field is ignored for both EAS real alerts and tests, but may be used by other systems that monitor IPAWS. You can ignore Headline for your EAS test.

Description text field: In a real alert, this would be an expanded paragraph describing the emergency, and would appear in the TV crawl message at the bottom of the screen in a real emergency. For your EAS test, you should put text in this field, as it will be printed out on broadcaster EAS logs. (See WEM example text below.)

Instruction text field: In a real alert, this statement would be the "call to action", and would appear in the TV crawl message at the bottom of the screen immediately following the Description text. For your EAS test, you should put text in this field, as it will be printed out on broadcaster EAS logs. (See WEM example text below.)

IPAWS EAS Test Sample Text: As an example, when Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) does an IPAWS test, this is the text they use…
Description: Wisconsin Statewide Required Weekly Test
Instruction: This is a test message from the Emergency Alert System originating from the State of Wisconsin Emergency Operations Center. If this had been an actual emergency, you would have been given official information, news, or instructions. This test is now concluded.

D. Audio included in the IPAWS EAS Test Message

You are not required to put an audio message into your EAS test, but it would be good practice for your alert origination staff to become familiar with inserting an audio message. WEM does include an audio message with their EAS tests; they simply read the message that is contained in the Instruction text above. In a real alert, it is the FCC's intent that the audio message match the text message.

E. Verifying that your Test Worked

Following your IPAWS EAS test, you should check with a broadcaster in your county to be sure the message was received. The message will be received by all broadcasters and cable operators in the county, but it may be best to have prior arrangements to contact a particular station after the test. Cable distribution head-ends where the EAS equipment is located are typically not staffed, so it may be easier to reach a broadcaster than a cable operator for immediate verification.

III.   IPAWS WEA TESTING

At the present time, FCC rules do not allow for the testing of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to cell phones. Under the current timeline, wireless carriers will be required to disseminate WEA tests from state and local authorities by May 1, 2019. This guidance document will be updated once WEA testing has come online.