



*The House Committee on*  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**

*Peter T. King (R-NY), Chairman*

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Media Contact: Shane Wolfe  
(202) 226-8417

**Statement of Chairman Gus M. Bilirakis**

**Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications**

**“Communicating With the Public During Emergencies: An Update on Federal  
Alert and Warning Efforts”**

**July 8, 2011**

The various disasters we have had in this country thus far this year have served to illustrate that timely communication is vital in an emergency and the availability of critical information can help individuals protect themselves from harm.

Be it through television, radio, mobile devices, the internet, social media, reverse 911, or warning sirens, emergency managers and emergency response providers must have prompt and reliable means to provide information to their citizens.

At a joint subcommittee hearing last month, Sheriff Richard Berdnik of Passaic County, New Jersey noted the challenges his jurisdiction faces in alerting the public to an impending hazard. He told us that it would take seven days to reach all the residents of his county using their reverse 911 system. This is simply unacceptable.

That is why I am pleased to hear from our witnesses today about advancements in alert and warning capabilities.

This November, FEMA and the FCC will hold the first-ever national test of the emergency alert system. Following on successful tests in Alaska in 2010 and earlier this year, this national test will demonstrate the ability to quickly disseminate messages nationally across all broadcast media.

FEMA and the FCC are also working to deploy a system to send geographically based alerts to cellphones. Required by the WARN Act, this system, known as CMAS or PLAN, is required to be deployed nationwide by April 2012. Early deployment in New York City and Washington, D.C. will occur this November.

At a field hearing in my district last month we received testimony from State and

local emergency managers. They are very optimistic about the implementation of CMAS/PLAN, especially because of its ability to reach commuter and tourist populations.

I will note that there have been some privacy concerns raised about PLAN. I am interested to hear from our Federal witnesses about privacy safeguards for the system.

I would also like to hear about the training that will be provided to message originators to ensure proper use of the system. It is very important that this system be used in a targeted way to ensure that when an imminent threat alert is sent people take notice.

And as we work to ensure that we reach as many individuals as possible through our alert and warning systems, I am interested in hearing how the needs of individuals with functional needs, such as hearing and visual impairments, are incorporated into these efforts.

I think we can all agree that the more notice and information we can give to citizens to help them get out of harm's way, the better. I thank our witnesses for appearing here today. I look forward to your testimony.

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