



DIANNE JACOB

SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

January 2, 2018

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445 12th Street SW
Washington DC 20554

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners:

I am writing today to urge your support for immediate, critical improvements to the Wireless Emergency Alert System. Specifically, to create a system by May of 2019 with more refined geo-targeting which is not only *technically possible* but also *paramount to public safety*.

During past disasters which included mass evacuation, San Diego County has relied heavily on a mass notification system populated with listed and unlisted landline telephone numbers called AlertSanDiego. We use this system annually to evacuate thousands of people from fires. As more and more people drop landline phone service in favor of mobile phones, traditional mass notification systems are becoming less relevant. These systems require residents to proactively register their mobile phones and participation around the country is unfortunately dismal, limiting the ability of first responders to notify residents of evacuation orders.

WEA, on the other hand, requires no proactive “opt-in.” However, because system improvements have yet to be enacted by the FCC and wireless carriers, WEA is largely impractical for major metropolitan areas with dense population centers. Imprecise geo-targeting is preventing WEA from becoming a primary alert and warning system – putting lives unnecessarily at risk in the very jurisdictions most likely to experience catastrophic disasters.

The County of San Diego, which is 4,206 square miles or roughly the size of the state of Connecticut, encompasses a large geographical area such that alert and warning messages broadcast to the entire county population of 3.4

million people is rarely, if ever, needed. Flash floods, fires and other hazards often impact a subset of our county's population and we need to utilize WEA to alert *only those* who may be impacted. With the current system, WEA alerts are received more than 50+ miles from the intended audience and sometimes received by residents of neighboring counties.

It is inconceivable to think WEA enabled devices already have the technology needed to add more refined message targeting. This problem can be solved. I urge the Commission to vote to create an emergency alert system that, by May 2019 at the latest, will require wireless carriers to implement device software updates to allow the device to use its location to decide whether to receive the alert. One-tenth of a mile should be the geo-targeting capability you implement for WEA.

Additional improvements such as incorporating web links and map images into WEA messages remain priorities. However, more immediately, precise message geo-targeting is a "must-have." These improvements have been discussed for several years and the time to act is now. Thank you for your sense of urgency in solving this problem and for voting to enact rule changes accordingly.

Sincerely,



Dianne Jacob
Chairwoman

San Diego County Board of Supervisors