

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Wireless Emergency Alerts)	PS Docket No. 15-91
)	
Amendments to Part 11 of the Commission’s Rules)	PS Docket No. 15-94
Regarding the Emergency Alert System)	

COMMENTS OF APCO INTERNATIONAL

The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International, Inc. (APCO) hereby submits the following comments in response to the Commission’s Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) concerning the above-captioned proceedings.¹

Founded in 1935, APCO is the nation’s oldest and largest organization of public safety communications professionals. APCO is a non-profit association with over 27,000 members, primarily consisting of state and local government employees who manage and operate public safety communications systems – including 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), radio networks, and information technology – for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety agencies.

APCO has previously commented in the Commission’s alert-related proceedings to, among other things, express support for enhancing the use and effectiveness of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) and explain APCO’s interest in public safety alerts and the connection to 9-1-1.² Here, APCO offers feedback

¹ Wireless Emergency Alerts, Amendments to Part 11 of the Commission’s Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 16-127, PS Docket Nos. 15-91 and 15-94, (rel. Sept. 29, 2016) (hereinafter “R&O and FNPRM”).

² For example, APCO noted that PSAPs play a special role in early detection and public alerting of threats. By their nature, PSAP staff and management know their communities and local responder agencies very well, as they communicate every day with 9-1-1 callers and first responders. Thus, by having WEA at their disposal, especially an enhanced WEA system with additional features, PSAPs can play an essential role in tailoring emergency alerts and warnings. Comments of APCO, Docket No. 15-91, at 1-2 (filed Jan. 13, 2016).

on the Commission’s proposals with regard to ensuring the provision of effective WEA alert messages, leveraging technological advancements, and improving consumer education and the transparency of the WEA system.

I. Ensuring the Provision of Effective Alert Messages

A. Alert Message Preservation

APCO agrees that having continued access to WEA messages could promote superior public safety outcomes and therefore supports the Commission’s proposal to amend section 10.500 of its rules to state that “WEA-capable mobile devices must preserve Alert Messages in an easily accessible format and location until the Alert Message expires.”³ Continued access to alert messages is especially important given the Commission’s recent adoption of rules that provide for a higher character limit and embedded references such as URLs and phone numbers in WEA messages,⁴ and it will become even more important once WEA is enhanced with content-rich features such as multimedia. APCO agrees with FEMA that alert preservation also has the potential to reduce milling behavior, which should help to allay concerns that some WEA enhancements will produce harmful network congestion.⁵

B. Many-to-One Messaging

The Commission seeks comment on how to enhance the WEA system’s support for many-to-one communications, particularly in relation to disaster relief messaging.⁶ As the Commission acknowledges, many commenters, including APCO, expressed concern that an additional data stream for crowdsourced information could overwhelm already understaffed PSAPs.⁷ APCO also pointed out that while managing the emergency response, PSAPs would also need to devote limited time and resources to verifying the

³ R&O and FNPRM, at para. 116.

⁴ *Id.*, at para. 2.

⁵ *Id.*, at paras. 10-31, 118, 185.

⁶ *Id.* at para. 124.

⁷ *See Id.*, at FN 520.

accuracy and thus the reliability of the feedback.⁸ Thus, APCO supports the proposal to convene a panel of experts to produce recommendations, as recommended by CSRIC V.⁹

II. Leveraging Technological Advancements

A. Multimedia Content in WEA Messages

APCO continues to support the inclusion of multimedia content in WEA messages.¹⁰ The Commission's recent action to require that participating providers support embedded URLs and phone numbers in WEA messages is a helpful step.¹¹ Embedding pictures, maps, and other multimedia content would further improve emergency planning and response and provide the public with better emergency information. Messages with embedded references have become ubiquitous in many other forms of communication, including a variety of non-WEA alerting methods used by state and local agencies such as social media, text messages, mobile apps, etc. Further, providing more detailed information about an emergency through embedded multimedia would help reduce milling behavior and duplicative 9-1-1 calls.

B. Matching the Geographic Target Area

APCO supports the Commission's proposal to improve geo-targeting by requiring participating wireless carriers to match the target area provided by an alert originator, and agrees that "matching" the target area should mean delivery to 100% of devices within a target area with not more than 0.1 mile overshoot.¹² Improved geo-targeting will promote greater trust of WEA alerts, reduce alert fatigue, and avoid unnecessary concern caused to unaffected parties.

⁸ Comments of APCO, at 7 (filed Jan. 13, 2016) (stating "while the integrity of messages delivered through an official one-way alert system can be ensured, feedback from the general public cannot by comparison be readily vetted, secured, and confirmed, and therefore cannot be relied upon, at least in the usually limited window of time to respond to emergencies.").

⁹ R&O and FNPRM, at para. 125.

¹⁰ Comments of APCO, at 6-7 (filed Jan. 13, 2016).

¹¹ R&O and FNPRM, at para. 29.

¹² *Id.*, at paras. 139-140.

As APCO has previously noted,¹³ effective geo-targeting is also very helpful for PSAPs in order to lessen inquiries from members of the public who are located outside of the impacted area yet receive the alert. The goal should be to reduce, to the maximum extent possible, unintended confusion, concern, and even harm caused by alerts to the public who are in fact unaffected. Further, targeting messages helps emergency managers and responders to better control and manage the situation, so that the right segments of the population are identified and provided the information or direction they need to be safe and enable responders to do their jobs.

C. WEA on 5G Networks

APCO appreciates the Commission's initiative to seek comment on the impact of 5G devices and networks on WEA's capabilities.¹⁴ 5G technology holds great promise to lead to more efficient and advanced WEA features, benefiting public safety. APCO supports the Commission's efforts to ensure that opportunities to improve WEA are considered at the outset of 5G network deployment.

III. Improving Consumer Education and the Transparency of the WEA System

A. Promoting Consumer Choice

The Commission proposes requiring participating wireless carriers "to disclose sufficient information at the point of sale to allow customers to make an informed decision about whether they would consistently receive WEA Alert Messages if they were to become a subscriber."¹⁵ Promoting consumer choice and providing better notice regarding WEA at the point of sale could lead to increased use of the system, which would benefit public safety. Point of sale disclosures should include information such as how WEA capabilities vary by device, network technology, or geographic area. This is especially important for providers who elect to participate "in part." Providers that elect not to

¹³ Comments of APCO, Docket No. 15-94, Docket No. 15-91, at 4 (filed June 8, 2016); Comments of APCO, at 7-8 (filed Jan. 13, 2016).

¹⁴ R&O and FNPRM, at paras. 147-48.

¹⁵ *Id.*, at para. 151.

participate in WEA should be required to affirmatively disclose that consumers will not receive any potentially life-saving alerts through service with this carrier.

The Commission also proposes requiring participating wireless carriers “to implement changes to the WEA application that would provide the public with more granular options regarding whether they receive WEA Alert Messages.”¹⁶ On one hand, allowing consumers to customize WEA alerts could lead to greater public use of WEA because, rather than opting out of the optional alerts altogether, a consumer would benefit from the delivery of at least some messages. On the other hand, options such as allowing consumers to only receive alerts at a specific time could potentially defeat their purpose. APCO is concerned that over-customization could undermine the valuable uniformity and reliability that distinguishes WEA from other forms of wireless-based alerting and information such as social media, texting services, and mobile apps. WEA needs to continue to be set apart and recognized by the general public as the only official channel for reliable and secure dissemination of alerts that require immediate attention and action.

B. Improving WEA Transparency

The Commission proposes requiring participating wireless carriers to submit annual WEA performance reports addressing geo-targeting, latency, availability, and reliability.¹⁷ As a general matter, APCO supports WEA testing and performance reporting. Testing is fundamental to public safety communications, and the annual performance reports will increase transparency and improve the system’s trustworthiness and effectiveness. For similar reasons, APCO supports the creation of a uniform format for alert logging and the collection of more detailed system integrity data.¹⁸ By having more detailed data about the alerts in a uniform, manageable format, public safety officials would be able to provide helpful feedback to the industry.

¹⁶ R&O and FNPRM, at para. 155.

¹⁷ *Id.*, at para. 161.

¹⁸ *See id.*, at para. 173.

Respectfully submitted,

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