

Comments Submitted by Elizabeth Reimink on Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC-15-154A1,
Improving Wireless Emergency Alerts and Community (PS Docket No. 15-91)

Mason County Emergency Management in Michigan supports the FCC's proposed changes to the length of WEA messages to 360 characters. Additional information in the WEA would be able to point recipients to other sources of information to confirm and follow-up on the alert. The ability to provide additional, more descriptive actions would allow citizens to better respond to the alert. Additionally, allowing URLs and/or phone numbers would assist citizens in locating additional emergency information. In the few instances when a WEA message has been received in our community, the public already turns to internet based news media and/or social media to confirm the alert and learn more. The ability to immediately direct the public's attention to a specific site would be invaluable to provide life-saving information.

While the inclusion of the new WEA category titled "Emergency Government Information" would be appropriate as a supplement to Imminent Threat Alerts; if this category were utilized as a standalone alerting classification, we feel that it would desensitize the public due to the fact that some local authorities would over utilize the system. If Emergency Government Information was used to supplement an already approved alert classification, then the public would better understand its use and not become complacent to warnings. While boil water advisories are important, they are not an imminent threat to life and health, in most instances. Local jurisdictions should have other warning systems and plans in place.

Another complication with the use of an Emergency Government Information message comes with the inability to specifically warn only those with reliance on public water systems. For example, in rural communities, only a limited segment of the population is on a public water system; without the ability to target a WEA below a County boundary level, a WEA for a boil water advisory would significantly desensitize the public to other messages. Making addition categories for the public to opt-in or opt-out of will cause more confusion. The public is generally uneducated about WEAs until one occurs, and at that time we are encouraging the public to not opt-out of future alerts.

The enhancement of geo-targeting an alert to a polygon level smaller than a county boundary would minimize over-alerting, and reduce alert fatigue. If geo-targeting were a possibility for all alerts, the ability to bleed over into other jurisdictions would be beneficial. Currently, two alerts are needed to effectively warn all citizens during events that occur on a county boundary. The benefit to life safety would be improved if one alert was allowed to be across jurisdictional lines directly to the at risk populations.

Allowing a local testing ability would be an incredible benefit to community citizens. Even if the test was limited to once a year, the ability to pre-educate our citizens on the system and test its effectiveness would greatly benefit required disaster drills. If local and state drills were limited to once a year, the new ability could be left as an opt-out option. Getting the public to opt-in would reduce the ability to test the effectiveness of the system for local emergency management. Requiring all providers to support the testing furthers the effectiveness of preparedness drills for public safety entities and the public alike.