Alameda County Unified Mass Notification System
"AC Alert"
USE POLICY

I. PURPOSE:

This policy establishes guidelines for the use of AC Alert to disseminate protective action instructions to affected populations during emergencies and to disseminate all other kinds of messages to community members who have opted in to receiving such messages.

II. POLICY:

This policy establishes appropriate use of the Alameda County Unified Mass Notification System (Alameda County Alert) hereinafter referred to as **"AC Alert."** This policy applies to Alameda County and the Cities participating with Alameda County in the AC Alert Advisory Committee.

The Alameda County Unified Mass Notification service, AC Alert, will be the system designated for mass notification under this policy. AC Alert provides the ability to send voice notifications to land line, mobile, and VoIP phones; SMS text messages mobile phones; TTY/TDD messages to such devices; fax messages to fax machines; and emails to email accounts. Additionally, AC Alert provides the ability to disseminate messages using the federal Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) and associated capabilities, including Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), the Emergency Alert System (EAS), and other systems.

Participants agree that AC Alert can be used as a public alerting tool under two scenarios:

1. When an incident threatens life or property in Alameda County, participants can use AC Alert to disseminate protective action instructions to affected county residents and visitors.
2. In all other circumstances, participants can use AC Alert to distribute information only to community members who have opted in to receiving such messages.

III. DEFINITIONS:

1. **Participating Agency:** Participating Agencies include the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and any other County or City agency that has been authorized by the County of Alameda to access and use the AC Alert system.
2. **System Administrator:** Each Agency's System Administrator is responsible for ensuring the Agency adheres to the established polices and guidelines for use of the AC Alert system. Annually, the System Administrator shall provide the Alameda County Sheriff's Office, in writing, the names of those personnel who are authorized by the Agency to activate the AC Alert system.
3. **Authorized User:** A person who has received proper training in the use of the AC Alert service and has been authorized to access the system in a capacity designated by their System Administrator.

4. **Dispatcher:** An authorized user in the AC Alert system who is authorized to send notifications to designated persons or groups falling within the user's hierarchal level of authorization, as detailed in this policy. A Dispatcher does not have administrative permissions.
5. **Group Manager:** An authorized user in the AC Alert system who is authorized to access the system for the purpose of adding and/or editing user information and groups within their assigned group. A Group Manager also has full message sender permissions.
6. **Mass Notification System (AC Alert):** A system capable of broadcasting messages to large numbers of people through multiple devices including land line, mobile and VoIP telephone, electronic mail, facsimile, and TTY/TDD.
7. **The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS):** Part of a National Initiative under Executive Order 13407 to develop an effective, reliable, integrated, flexible, and comprehensive system to alert and warn the American people. IPAWS provides alerting authorities the capability to send a single message over multiple communication pathways which include:
    - Emergency Alert System (EAS)
    - Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)
    - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) All-Hazards Weather Radio
    - Other Future Technologies
8. **Emergency condition:** A situation that poses a substantial threat to the health and welfare of community members, requiring those individuals to take immediate protective action.
9. **Non-emergency condition:** A situation in which there is a need to notify the public however, such notification does not contain protective action instructions.
10. **External Contacts:** Alameda County residents and businesses whose contact information is contained within the database of the AC Alert Public Org. Contact information for external contacts includes E911 data and commercially available white and yellow page data which is uploaded into the database of the Public Org and refreshed twice annually. External contacts also include contact information for those that have "opted-in" to the AC Alert system.
11. **Voluntary "Opt-In**": The process in which community members within Alameda County and Cities may sign up their communication devices to receive non-emergency notifications and/or provide additional contact information to ensure that they receive notifications sent via AC Alert.
12. **Internal Notification:** Internal communications, such as responder call-outs, to agency designated internal notification groups.
13. **Internal Contacts:** An employee or volunteer of the County or participating City who may be included in internal Notification Groups.
14. **Community member:** Member of the general public who may receive emergency messages and who may opt-in to receive non-emergency messages.
15. **Elevated non-emergency notification:** A situation which does not rise to the level of an emergency notification, however the sending jurisdiction determines that App and email delivery methods are insufficient and opts to utilize voice and text delivery methods in addition.

IV. PROCEDURE:

A. AC Alert Advisory Committee:

The AC Alert Advisory Committee is a County-wide organization composed of participating City and County Agency Representatives. Maintained and led by the Alameda County System Administrator, the AC Alert Advisory Committee shall meet semi-annually to conduct after action reviews of the system usage, coordinate ongoing administration, training, public outreach, modifications to policies and guidelines, or other issues related to AC Alert. All recommendations for substantive changes to the AC Alert use policy shall be submitted to the Operational Area Council for approval.

B. General:

1. System access and authorization to send broadcasts shall be the responsibility of the Alameda County Sheriff and designated AC Alert agencies in each participating City.

2. AC Alert can be used as a public alerting tool when an incident threatens life or property in Alameda County, in order to disseminate protective action instructions to the affected county residents and visitors.

3. AC Alert can also be used to distribute non-emergency community information to community members that have opted-in to AC Alert and signed up to receive these notifications.

   For each message sent using AC Alert, the agency sending the message shall be responsible for managing the questions, comments or concerns arising from the message. To this end, each message sent through AC Alert shall include sources of additional information as well as the agency sending the message.

   a. Each message will have a title that will appear at the beginning of text-based messages.
   b. The message body shall start with something to the effect of: "This is an AC Alert from (insert jurisdiction here)."

4. The AC Alert Advisory Committee is established with representatives from the Alameda County Sheriff, County Agencies, and participating City representatives, designated by their jurisdictions.

5. The Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) is an international public alerting standard required for IPAWS messages. All emergency messages distributed through AC Alert shall be formatted using CAP, whether or not IPAWS is used to disseminate the message.

C. Emergency Uses:

2. The Alameda County Sheriff's Office or authorized representatives of Participating Agencies will be responsible for the use of AC Alert for emergency notifications that may be broadcast within the geographic boundaries of the sending agency.

3. Emergency use covers incidents where an **"Emergency condition"** exists that threatens life or property in Alameda County, **for which responders need affected community members to take immediate protective action(s)**. In all cases, emergency messages should be delivered proactively.

4. The nature of the incident and directions from authorized public safety officials will dictate the specific protective action instructions for given incident or event. Based on CAP, examples of protective action instructions may include:

    a. Shelter - Shelter in place
    b. Evacuate - Relocate as instructed
    c. Prepare - Make preparations
    d. Execute - Execute a pre-planned activity
    e. Avoid - Avoid the hazard
    f. Monitor - Attend to information sources
    g. All clear - The event no longer poses a threat or concern

5. When a jurisdiction's public safety officials issue protective action instructions to the community, the jurisdiction's AC Alert System Administrator will determine whether AC Alert should be activated to disseminate those instructions.

6. The jurisdiction's AC Alert System Administrator may designate Authorized Users in the jurisdiction with pre-approval to disseminate emergency messages using AC Alert.

    a. An emergency notification can be sent to all County residents and visitors, to single or multiple Cities, or to a select group of residents and visitors falling into a geo-targeted area.

7. Emergency messages should be sent in the most targeted manner possible in order to avoid alerting fatigue and limit confusion of community members unaffected by the emergency, and to ensure that excess messaging credits are not expended unnecessarily.

    a. Message senders should use map features (polygon, circle, or existing shapefile) to limit the target area to only those residents directly impacted by the emergency.
    b. An alerting agency that sends a notification to recipients outside of a reasonably targeted area for the incident, whether done intentionally or erroneously, shall be responsible for the cost of replacing the excess messaging credits expended.

8. Non-emergency messages (which do not contain protective action instructions) may also be sent during incidents/events. Non-emergency messages are intended to keep interested community members informed about response to high-profile events. Community members need to opt-in to receive these messages. See *Non-Emergency Uses* for details.

9. Exception to the **"Emergency condition"** requirement for emergency uses:

    a. In **limited instances**, an emergency use may be appropriate for incidents that do not require recipients take immediate protective action, as defined in this policy under **"Emergency condition."** One example of a potential exception to this requirement would be an incident in which an at-risk person(s) is in grave danger and where immediate public awareness of the situation may substantially reduce the potential for harm.

        i. In these cases, it is the responsibility of the Incident Commander, working with the jurisdiction's authorized AC Alert message senders, to determine if the public protection obligations of the incident outweigh any potential concerns of intrusiveness imposed upon the affected community.
        ii. The message should be sent to a narrow, focused, target area encompassing only a reasonably appropriate area given the circumstances of the particular incident.
        iii. Missing person's notifications should have full descriptions of the individual including, but not limited to:
            1. Name
            2. Physical characteristics
            3. Last known location and time
            4. Any mental/physical limitations such as dementia.
            5. Recent photograph if available

D. Non-Emergency Uses:

1. The Alameda County Sheriff's Office or authorized City System Administrators will be responsible for the use of AC Alert for non-emergency incident templates

2. The primary distinction between emergency and non-emergency messages is that **non-emergency messages do not contain protective action instructions** for the message recipient to follow. Non-emergency notifications are primarily intended for the dissemination of government or utility-related program information. The urgency, hazards and topics of non-emergency messages will vary widely, and may include:

    a. Missing persons notifications
    b. Non-emergency weather alerts
    c. Traffic problems
    d. Parking restrictions

e. Street closures
f. Water system issues
g. Significant police or fire activity
h. Public health concerns
i. Crime information
j. Notifications to update residents on important programs or special events

3. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive; however, use of AC Alert for the dissemination of the following types of messages is strictly prohibited:

    a. Any message of a commercial nature
    b. Advertising or solicitations
    c. Any message of a political nature
    d. Any non-official business (e.g. articles, sales, retirement announcements, etc.)

4. AC Alert may be used to disseminate non-emergency information only to community members who have **opted-in** to receive this information.

    a. Non-Emergency Uses **WILL NOT** utilize White, Yellow page, AT&T or Comcast data.
    b. Non-Emergency uses will **ONLY** be sent to Opt-in subscribers via the Everbridge app (ContactBridge) and email.
        i. The exception would be an **elevated non-emergency notification** as defined below (IV.D.8)
    c. In most instances, when selecting contacts to receive a non-emergency notification the sender should use applicable rule(s) rather than selecting all opt-ins within the sender's jurisdiction.

5. Each authorized System Administrator is responsible for determining the non-emergency (opt-in) messaging groups (subscriptions) that their jurisdiction will make available to community members.

6. Sending of non-emergency notifications will be restricted to between the hours of 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM unless circumstances require the message to be sent outside of that time frame.

7. Multiple non-emergency notifications on the same subject matter or within a short time frame shall be avoided so as to avoid notification fatigue among message recipients.

8. In some instances, even though no emergency condition exists, an alerting jurisdiction may determine that they want to send an **elevated non-emergency notification** using additional delivery methods beyond those allowed by policy for non-emergency notifications. Any alerting jurisdiction sending non-emergency notifications to messaging modalities other than those allowed by policy, weather

done intentionally or erroneously, assumes the liability for any excess costs that may result should the County exceed its annual allotment of messaging credits.

a. The associated costs for the purchase of additional messaging credits is based on the County's annual service agreement with Everbridge, as listed in the MOU for participation in the Unified Mass Notification Program.
b. Elevated non-emergency notification templates will be created by the jurisdiction.
c. Somewhere within the template, jurisdictions must indicate if this is an elevated non-emergency notification. An example would be the name of the template itself.
d. Nixle messages will still be at a Community publishing option only.
e. Time restrictions of non-emergency notifications still apply.
f. Discretion falls upon the cities to determine whether they want to incur the costs associated, this feature is optional to all partners.
g. Here are the additional allowances:
    i. Text and phones calls to opt-ins ONLY.
        1. Residential/Comcast/White/Yellow page data is still not authorized. Phone calls SHALL be condensed, when possible, to under one minute.

E. Cross-Jurisdiction Messages

1. The Alameda County Sheriff's Office will be responsible for use of AC Alert for any emergency or non-emergency messages to multiple jurisdictions within the county, and/or countywide messages.

    a. Partner agencies should coordinate with Alameda County OES to minimize duplicate messaging and ensure the consistency of information.
    b. Once the initial message has been broadcasted, partner agencies may send alerts providing additional information that may be *SPECIFIC* to their jurisdiction. These messages will be sent via the Everbridge mobile app and email **ONLY.**
    c. Alameda County OES has established a standing joint information center (JIC) in VEOCI. All cross-jurisdictional **non-emergency** messages will be posted by Alameda County OES prior to the message being sent out to allow for input from the cities.
        i. The JIS will establish expectations on the cross-jurisdictional/countywide messages to be sent.
        ii. The Cities will provide current lists of personnel who can provide input for the JIS.

2. It is the responsibility of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office to approve and distribute AC Alert notifications disseminated to an area encompassing the geographic boundaries of more than one local agency. Any participating agency identifying a need to provide an emergency notification to the public with a reasonable belief the incident may likely impact neighboring jurisdictions shall

notify the Alameda County Sheriff's Office to request the notification be broadcast to all potentially-impacted areas.

3. Exceptions to the above requirements include:

    a. Incidents in which public safety officials from the alerting agency believe that any delay in broadcasting the alert notification would pose an undue risk to life and/or property.

        iii. In such cases, as soon as reasonably possible, the participating agency broadcasting an alert notification outside of the geographic boundaries of their city shall notify Alameda County OES and the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) of any neighboring jurisdictions impacted by the emergency notifications.

    b. Notifications broadcast on behalf of, and within the geographic boundaries of, a neighboring jurisdiction that is also participating in the AC Alert system, when:

        iv. The broadcast is made at the direct request of that neighboring participating agency; or

        v. Where the sender is acting as an agent of the impacted participating agency, based on pre-existing agreements between those participating agencies.

F. Non-Participating Agencies

1. Agencies not participating in AC Alert may request that the Alameda County Sheriff's Office use the system to distribute emergency notifications to the public on their behalf.

    a. Upon review of the circumstances surrounding the request, the Director of Emergency Services, or his/her delegate(s), will have final authority to approve or deny any request for emergency broadcast from a non-participating agency.
    b. Requests for non-emergency use of the AC Alert system shall not be accepted from non-participating agencies.

G. Publishing Options – Member Portal. Social Media, and Nixle

1. Member Portal
    a. AC Alert allows for the publishing of **emergency** notifications or critical advisories to link social media accounts as well as the member portal.
    b. The Everbridge member portal is to be used if there is any additional information the sending agency wants to add that a text message cannot

convey. Notification recipients will receive a link to the member portal where the email portion of a message will be posted.

i. In an effort to prevent confusion, the portal should only be used in instances where you are providing additional critical information to recipients.
   a. Information such as:
      i. Pictures
      ii. Maps
      iii. Text that is too long for a text message.

c. Partner agencies should only use the social media publishing option of AC Alert for notifications that are consistent with emergency notifications consistent with Section IV.C – "Emergency Uses."

d. Exceptions to the emergency notification restriction would include advisories that impact multiple jurisdictions.

i. Examples include:

a) Weather alerts
b) Air quality/wildfire smoke advisories
c) Health alerts/advisories
d) Public Safety Power Shut-offs

ii. The Alameda County Sheriff's Office will be the responsible for publishing all cross jurisdictional advisories to the AC Alert social media accounts.

e. Participating agencies can follow the AC Alert Twitter feed on their City Twitter accounts.

i. Enables receipt of Twitter notifications of any Twitter message posted to the AC Alert Twitter feed.

ii. Allows participating agencies to "retweet" appropriate AC Alert Twitter posts through their City Twitter accounts.

2. Nixle
   a. Participating agencies will be able to utilize the Nixle publishing option for any message sent to the public. However, the Nixle option will be standardized based off the definitions of non-emergency and emergency messages.
      i. Non-emergency notifications: For non-emergency notifications, partners will ONLY utilize the Community option for Nixle.

1. This option will send the notification to Nixle subscribers with emails and those who have identified in their Nixle profile to receive text messages.
2. This method of usage also posts to the Nixle website for further distribution.

ii. Emergency notification: For emergency notifications, partners will have the discretion to utilize any of the Nixle publishing options.

1. Based off of incident template creation, there is a possibility that the Nixle option will default to Alert due to the Imminent Threat option being chosen as the default in the template. Users will not be able to toggle the Nixle publishing options with this default being selected.

H. IPAWS Messages

1. On behalf of the Alameda County Operational Area, Alameda County has entered into a MOA with FEMA designating the agency as a Collaborative Operating Group (COG) with IPAWS public alerting authority through the AC Alert system.

2. IPAWS public alerting messages include:

   a. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)
   b. Emergency Alert System (EAS) activations
   c. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) alerts
   d. A certain subset of emergency messages will meet the standards for delivery through IPAWS:
      i. IPAWS messages are to be issued only for extreme or severe hazards.
      ii. The hazard must have happened or be likely to happen.
      iii. IPAWS messages must contain protective action instructions that recipients must follow within 1 hour in order to reduce their vulnerability to an imminent threat.

3. The Alameda County Sheriff's Office will be responsible for the management of distributing IPAWS licenses for the use of IPAWS in AC Alert.

4. Certified messages senders from one of the partner cities are able to apply for a specific role that would allow cities within Alameda County to send IPAWS messages to the public.

   a. City message senders who wish to obtain the IPAWS must complete Alameda County's IPAWS application through Veoci. Through this application, city message senders will demonstrate proficiency by:
      i. Completing the FEMA course on IPAWS (IS-247 series).
      ii. Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the AC Alert policy.
      iii. Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the use of IPAWS messages.

iv. A review of Everbridge best practices
v. Pass with a 90% or better score on the IPAWS exam.
vi. Sign the statement of understanding.

b. Partner agencies, and Alameda County OES, will utilize a PIN code to send IPAWS messages through Everbridge.
   i. This PIN code will change every year.
   ii. Alameda County OES will be tasked with updating and distributing the PIN code every year.
c. The IPAWS application must be submitted through Veoci and can be found here: https://veoci.com/v/p/dashboard/y5jjkdq6m4

5. Any IPAWS activation request must be approved by the Alameda County Director of Emergency Services, one of his or her delegate(s), or an incident commander from one of the partnering agencies whether the request comes from a participating agency or a non-participating agency.

   a. If a city has a need for an IPAWS message during working hours, cities will notify the Office of Emergency Services to request an IPAWS message.
      i. Cities are able to send IPAWS notifications if a user has completed Alameda County's IPAWS proficiency application..
   b. If a city has a need for an IPAWS message after working hours, cities will notify the Alameda County Sheriff's Office Dispatch center to request an IPAWS message after working hours.
      i. Placeholder for the process for non-working hours – do we just leave it as is?

6. FEMA has instituted monthly testing requirements for IPAWS users. Monthly IPAWS tests will be conducted from the Alameda County Office of Emergency Services.

   a. Cities will be able to test their internal procedures to request an IPAWS message.
   b. Cities that have demonstrated IPAWS proficiency will send an IPAWS message to the IPAWS lab once a quarter to maintain their IPAWS credential with the County.

Internal Notifications:

1. The AC Alert system is capable of disseminating notifications to predetermined internal employee/volunteer groups and allows recipients to confirm receipt of the notification. These communications may include:

   a. Responder call-outs
   b. Mission critical information
   c. Response updates and/or cancellations

2. Authorized System Administrators are responsible for establishing the internal contact groups used by their agency. This includes inputting and maintaining associated contact information to ensure it is current and accurate.
3. There will be no limitations on the number of messages sent internally. There will also be no limitations on text/voice messages sent internally.
    a. Recommendation: limit internal phone calls and provide unlimited text messages.

I. Coordination of Notification Systems:

Certain situations will require coordinated use of AC Alert across departments within Alameda County and its participating Cities. All County departments and cities or other organizations outside the Alameda County Sheriff's Office will be required to sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) governing the use and cooperative sharing of the AC Alert resource.

In addition to the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and authorized and trained County PSAP-911 Communications departments, the following is a non-exclusive listing of the types of organizations that may be granted access to the AC Alert system upon executing the Memorandum of Understanding with the County.

- Alameda County departments
- Cities in Alameda County
- Other public offices as approved by the Alameda County Sheriff's Office.

All people responsible for disseminating messages in the AC Alert System must take into consideration the importance of message coordination, resource sharing, and the need to minimize public alerting fatigue in response to overuse of the system.

The needs of Alameda County and other authorized AC Alert system users may differ. In such situations it is important that the use of AC Alert is coordinated so as to eliminate multiple messages with the same or similar content and to eliminate conflicting messages. All participating agencies will work to eliminate conflicting, confusing or duplicative messages from being sent.

To ensure message consistency in the event the Alameda County Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and City EOC(s) are activated for the same event, all AC Alert emergency notifications will be coordinated through the

Joint Information Center (JIC) at the Alameda County Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and disseminated only after all stakeholders have collaborated and agreed upon the information and objectives relative to the incident.

J. Privacy Policy:

It is the policy of the Alameda County Sheriff and each member jurisdiction to preserve and protect the integrity and the privacy of personal data that is collected for use with AC Alert. Such data includes personal contact information including residence and business addresses, home phone numbers, work phone numbers, pager numbers, cellular telephone numbers, TDD/TTY numbers and text and email addresses.

It is understood that the notification data contained within the AC Alert service contains proprietary information that is designated "for emergency use only" and that such data may contain otherwise unpublished and unlisted telephone numbers provided by residents who "opt-in" through the self-registration portal and are not to be disseminated. No personal data will be disseminated or extracted from the master telephone number and contact path table, which is a part of AC Alert, nor are reports produced by AC Alert to be used for any other purpose than mass notification.

K. Establishing and Maintaining AC Alert Contact Information:

The database of contact information throughout the region will be established using E-911 contact data from phone service providers, as well as public, published "White Page" (residential) and "Yellow Page" (business) phone directory information.

The E-911, White Page and Yellow Page directory information will be updated semi-annually. Additionally, community members will be able to sign up through the AC Alert "opt-in" web page. This voluntary process allows people to provide additional contact information to ensure that they receive desired notifications sent via AC Alert. All contact information uploaded into the AC Alert database will be geocoded to the map data of Alameda County and its Cities.

When registering for AC Alert, community members will have the ability to opt-in to receive certain types of non-emergency messages. Community members registering or loaded through white pages information will not be able to opt out of emergency notifications unless they verify they no longer reside in the area.

It will be the responsibility of the community member who signed up to maintain and make changes to his or her contact information when moving or when contact information changes.

Departments/organizations that collect and upload contact information for public and internal contact groups into AC Alert are responsible for maintaining that data.

L. Resolution of Issues or Disputes:

The resolution of any issues or disputes in the use of AC Alert will reside with the Alameda County Director of Emergency Services.

M. AC Alert System Training:

No person or entity shall be able to activate and send an alert or notification to the public except those who are authorized and approved in writing by the Alameda County Sheriff's Office. Such persons representing a City or County Agency shall complete all training required to become an authorized and trained activator of the AC Alert Mass Notification System. Any individual or agency who is determined to have violated the policies and procedures governing the use of the AC Alert Mass Notification System is subject to removal from the list of authorized users.