

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VITEMA To Test FEMA's Integrated Public Alert & Warning System This Summer

Weather Updates / **Published On July 10, 2019 06:59 PM /**

Staff **July 10, 2019**



FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) can help communities take proactive and protective action before a disaster strikes, and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), plans on testing the system this summer, according to Eric Adams, FEMA public affairs specialist.

Warning the public about potential threats and communicating clear instructions can be the difference between life and death, FEMA said in message published on Homeland Security Today, a nonprofit association media outlet dedicated to informing and supporting the efforts of public, private, nonprofit, and academic organizations and practitioners engaged in the homeland security mission.

According to FEMA, IPAWS offers emergency management officials a single interface to send emergency information to radio and television as Emergency Alert System (EAS) broadcasts, to cellular phones as Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), and through other modes of communication.

As FEMA continues to improve IPAWS through regular tests, at the local and national levels, the agency said it needs all communities to be aware and engaged to ensure it is operational and identify opportunities to make changes.

This year, FEMA will test the EAS via the [National Public Warning System \(NPWS\)](#) through Primary Entry Point (PEP) facilities. This will test the capability of the EAS system to deliver warnings to the public if internet connectivity is not available. The NPWS is composed of private or commercial radio broadcast stations that participate with FEMA to provide emergency alerts and warning information to the public. As the primary source of initial broadcast for a national alert, the NPWS was designed to provide a national warning capability for the president in the event of a dire emergency.

FEMA said although NPWS is primarily for the use of the president, the system can be used by local and state authorities with proper coordination with station personnel. In addition to decisions such as using NPWS and adopting and enforcing zoning and building codes, the decision to issue a WEA is made at the state or local level – from the type of alerts, to the geographic area covered by an alert. State authorities have full autonomy to originate these alerts via IPAWS that are directed to the geographic areas within their jurisdiction and to use the system for messages as they see fit to provide public safety. Each state has its own alert and warning policies and plans to guide the use of the system within their jurisdiction.

This year, FEMA added more than 200 various government agencies to the list of who can use IPAWS.

However, there is still a long way to go, the federal agency said. There are many communities that do not participate in IPAWS.

While there are challenges to the implementation of the system at the state and local level, FEMA provides key resources to help remove two major obstacles: training and funding, according to the release.

FEMA provides free training on the how to use the system. FEMA also runs the IPAWS Lab, which allows for an interactive and closed testing environment to increase proficiency and confidence of IPAWS users. Training builds the skills needed to react quickly in an emergency. Alerting authorities can test, evaluate and conduct operational assessments, demonstrations and leverage expert technical support.

In terms of funding, FEMA administers [grants](#) to support a full range of preparedness activities, and recipients can use some of their federal preparedness grants to support the purchase and maintenance of IPAWS equipment and software, as well as to train and exercise personnel who use the system.