FCC NEWS from the Federal Communications Commission

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For Immediate Release

CHAIRWOMAN ROSENWORCEL ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIPS TO ASSESS THE GEOGRAPHIC ACCURACY OF WIRELESS EMERGENCY ALERTS

Local WEA Tests to the Public Are Planned for September 12 & 13

WASHINGTON, August 30, 2022—Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel today announced that, for the first time ever, the FCC has entered into partnerships with 42 state and local government agencies to assess the geographic accuracy of Wireless Emergency Alerts in areas across the country during local tests planned for September 12 and 13, 2022. The FCC also sent letters to nationwide wireless providers asking them to provide information on their performance in those tests. The FCC's analysis of survey and industry data will further its effort to ensure that Wireless Emergency Alerts—which have been used more than 70,000 times to warn the public about dangerous weather, missing children, and other critical situations—are as geographically accurate, timely, and reliable as possible.

"Wireless Emergency Alerts are a life-saving tool, but emergency managers tell us that they need more information on the geographic accuracy of these alerts in order to use them with confidence," **said Chairwoman Rosenworcel**. "Simply put, public safety officials want to know that the alerts will reliably reach public throughout—but not beyond—targeted areas during emergencies. These local tests, which are the latest in a recent series of FCC efforts to strengthen Wireless Emergency Alerts, will provide stakeholders with greater insight into alert performance so that this tool can be used to its fullest potential to help keep communities safe."

How the Local Tests Will Work: Each state and local agency that is partnering with the FCC will send a Wireless Emergency Alert to the public in a targeted local area of its choosing at a specified time on either September 12 or 13. The alert will sound and appear on compatible mobile devices using participating wireless networks in that area. The alert message will make clear that it is only a test and contain a link for the recipient to complete a survey about their receipt of the alert. Each agency will have a control group of volunteers in the targeted geographic area complete the survey, and members of the public may also do so. The tests are intended to assess the geographic accuracy of the alerts in addition to other performance factors, including reliability and speed. The state and local agencies will conduct outreach to raise public and stakeholder awareness of their tests. Backup dates for the test are September 19 and 20.

Test Partners: The FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau today issued an Order that will enable the state and local agency partners to conduct the Wireless Emergency Alert tests to the public. The tests will occur in a geographically diverse range of areas. The test partners can be viewed at https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-grants-waiver-local-wireless-emergency-alert-performance-tests.

Unprecedented FCC Efforts to Strengthen Wireless Emergency Alerts: Last year, the FCC partnered with 11 federal, state, and local agencies to assess the delivery of Wireless Emergency Alerts in areas across the country during an opt-in nationwide test. The FCC used survey data from this unprecedented partnership to assess the timeliness and success of alert delivery. The upcoming tests will now assess the accuracy of geographically targeted alerts. In addition, this April the FCC proposed rules to strengthen the effectiveness of Wireless Emergency Alerts, including through public reporting on the reliability, speed, and accuracy of these messages.

How Wireless Emergency Alerts Work: Authorized national, state, and local government authorities send the alerts through FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to participating wireless providers, which then push the alerts to compatible mobile devices in the affected area. Wireless provider participation is voluntary but widespread. Participating wireless providers must deliver the alerts to the area specified by the alert originator with no more than a 1/10 of a mile overshoot where technically feasible. According to industry estimates, approximately 60 percent of active smartphones in the U.S. support this "enhanced geotargeting" functionality, with the number to increase as consumers replace their devices with newer models.

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