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Media Advisory

The National Weather Service and the Nevada Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security Promote the Implementation of the New Wireless Emergency Alerts System

If you were in Northern Nevada on Monday and Tuesday this week, you may have received something like a message on your smart phone that was unlike any you have ever received before.

The National Weather Service (NWS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in cooperation with the wireless cell phone industry, has rolled out a new nationwide emergency alert system, called Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA). The WEA is a public safety system that allows customers who own certain wireless phone models and other enabled mobile devices, to receive geographically targeted messages alerting them of imminent threats to safety in their area - directly from FEMA, the National Weather Service and local public safety officials.

Whether at home or traveling through an area where a weather warning has been issued, a cell phone will pick up alerts broadcast by nearby cell towers. Those towers will broadcast the message much like an AM/FM radio station, and any enabled cell phones within range will immediately pick up the signal. When the phone receives a message, the device simultaneously sends an alert message with a unique ring tone and vibration.

The message will look like a text message, but it's not the traditional text message most people are accustomed to receiving on their cell phone. Unlike a traditional text message, the emergency alert message will automatically pop up on the cell phone's screen - the owner won't have to enter a code or open the screen to read it. And the cell phone user does not incur any cost for receiving the emergency alert.

The alerts will be issued for a few very distinct reasons. Alerts will be sent for extreme weather and other threatening emergencies. Additionally, there will be messages issued for AMBER Alerts and Presidential Alerts. You can opt-out of receiving WEA messages for imminent threats and AMBER alerts, but not for Presidential messages. To opt out, please refer to instructions from your wireless carrier or visit <http://www.ctia.org/wea> for more information.

"Wireless Emergency Alerts are another important way of receiving severe weather information - this time directly to your cell phone," said Chris Smallcomb, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, with the National Weather Service in Reno. "It is imperative that when you receive alerts on your phone that you also check local media or weather.gov for additional details and warning location information."

Severe weather incidents and emergencies pose legitimate safety concerns for Nevada's residents and visitors each year. "The Nevada Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (NDEM), the National Weather Service and your local emergency managers are committed to ensuring the safety of Nevada citizens and visitors, and are proud to be promoting this mobile device emergency warning system," said NDEM Chief Chris Smith. "This new capability allows for our citizens, visitors and communities to be better informed of emergencies and severe weather. This service will assist in saving lives and property."

For more information and frequently asked questions concerning WEA can be found at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/com/weatherreadynation/wea.html>

Information on the different types of severe weather such as earthquakes, wild fires, severe thunderstorms and flooding is available www.ready.gov/severeweather or the Spanish-language web site www.listo.gov.

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