



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20554

Brendan Carr
Chairman

April 1 2025

The Honorable Robert Garcia
U.S. House of Representatives
109 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FCC Los Angeles County Wildfire Response

Dear Representative Garcia:

Thank you for your letter regarding the performance of the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system during the devastating wildfires that struck Los Angeles County in January 2025. As you noted in your letter, appropriately timed, targeted, and clear messages can and do save lives. Indeed, since the launch of the WEA system in 2012, alert originators have issued nearly 96,000 WEAs, including messages that have led countless people to safety during disasters and aided the recovery of almost 200 missing and abducted children. But erroneous or improperly targeted alerts can have unintended and dire consequences.

Below I have provided responses to your questions about the WEA system's performance during the recent wildfires in Los Angeles County:

1. *What is the status of the joint investigation between Los Angeles County, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Federal Communications Commission into WEA alert messages sent following the cancellation and "echoes" continuing to transmit to phones across LA County?*

Shortly after reports of erroneous messages, the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau (the Bureau) joined staff from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency to conduct an in-depth examination of the WEA system's performance during the fires. Our work remains ongoing.

2. *Will there be a public after-action report, or recommendations following the conclusion of the investigation?*

While our work remains ongoing, the Bureau has identified technical and operational recommendations, discussed below, that would help mitigate the problems that occurred during the Los Angeles County wildfires. The Bureau is working with alert originators, wireless

providers, FEMA, and other stakeholders to ensure that relevant technological improvements, procedures, and requirements are adopted and implemented.

3. *What technological improvements are necessary for cell towers that have been knocked offline to correctly delete cached WEA messages which have been cancelled by the alerting authority?*

We understand that some people received expired or cancelled WEAs, and reports at the time suggested this was due to cell towers going offline and later sending “cached” WEAs once service was restored. Based on our investigation, however, it appears that cancelled or expired alerts were sent primarily due to other technical issues. Specifically, one wireless provider reported that a small percentage of its 4G LTE equipment transmitted expired alerts due to an “overload” attributable to the high volume and long duration of alerts sent during the fires. That provider has since deployed a temporary patch to address this issue, and we understand that the provider is developing a permanent repair that will resolve this issue.

4. *What technological improvements, procedures, or requirements are necessary for telecommunications providers to prevent the accidental repeat of WEA messages?*

WEA messages include unique identifiers that are tied to the individual service provider delivering the alert. While mobile devices should reject duplicate WEA messages, we have learned that these unique identifiers can be mistaken for different WEA messages, such that a mobile device will treat a single alert as two different alerts if they are sent by different providers. For this reason, a mobile device may display a duplicate WEA if it receives an alert from its home network and later roams onto another provider’s network (or moves from a 5G network to a 4G LTE network) while the WEA is active. We are exploring whether it would be feasible to create a single, industry-wide (not provider-specific) identification number for each alert.

In addition, an alert that is active for a long time can also contribute to receiving duplicate alerts. When alert originators send a WEA, they must decide when the alert expires so that wireless providers know for how long the alert should be retransmitted. Some alert originators decide to use a duration of 24 hours. An alert with an active period of 24 hours can generate a duplicate if the network retransmits the alert after the mobile device has cleared that alert from its memory. While mobile devices typically clear the alert 24 hours after receiving the alert or after it is turned off, some devices may clear the alert within a shorter timeframe. We are working with stakeholders to find ways to eliminate or mitigate these issues. We understand that FEMA is also reaching out to stakeholders to encourage alert originators to send WEAs with shorter active duration periods where appropriate, as well as to encourage other best practices based on the lessons learned during the Los Angeles County fires earlier this year.

We will continue to work with relevant stakeholders, including alert originators, FEMA, local and state government officials, and the wireless industry, to ensure that these issues are addressed and that appropriate remedial efforts and improvements are considered. We will also examine whether additional regulatory measures are appropriate to improve the effectiveness of emergency alerts. Of note, we recently took action to provide alert originators with the

flexibility to send silent WEA messages, which can better protect the public in some situations and reduce “alert fatigue,” which can cause consumers to opt out of this lifesaving service.

We look forward to continuing to work with your office to address these issues and to continually improving the WEA system so that it can continue to be an effective alerting tool.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B Carr", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brendan Carr
Chairman