

## **Regional WEA Test PR Kit FAQ/Talking Points**

### **National Capital Region – Regional Wireless Emergency Alerts (April 2018)**

#### **When is the regional test occurring?**

Twenty jurisdictions in the National Capital Region are conducting a simultaneous regional [Wireless Emergency Alerts \(WEA\)](#) system test on Thursday, April 5, 2018, between 10 – 11 a.m. Jurisdictions participating in the WEA test include: City of Alexandria, City of Bowie, City of College Park, City of Fairfax, City of Falls Church, City of Gaithersburg, City of Greenbelt, City of Takoma Park, City of Manassas, City of Manassas Park, City of Rockville, District of Columbia, **Arlington County**, Charles County, Fairfax County, Frederick County, Loudoun County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County and Prince William County.

#### **What if a real-world event happens on test day?**

In the event widespread severe weather or other significant event occurs on April 5, *the back-up date for the test is Monday, April 9, between 10-11 a.m.*

#### **What's so special about this test?**

The [National Capital Region's Emergency Managers Council of Governments](#) is conducting the country's first live, geo-targeting exercise of WEA of this magnitude — approximately 5.2 million residents and visitors will be in the test area. Each jurisdiction is notifying public safety, law enforcement, private/public sectors partners, public transit officials and the public.

#### **How will this group measure success?**

Local government emergency managers need to hear from the public about the test. Individuals are asked to complete a survey at [www.mwcog.org/wea](http://www.mwcog.org/wea) to share experiences regarding the WEA test. The survey closes on Friday, April 13.

#### **What is WEA?**

[WEA](#) is a public safety system allowing people who use cell phones and other mobile devices to receive geographically-targeted, text-like messages about threats to safety in their area.

#### **Are you doing this test because of what happened in Hawaii?**

No. Towards the end of 2017, emergency management officials determined exercising the coordination and deployment of a coordinated, regional WEA was needed to ensure the public receives the right information, at the right time, to make the right decisions during an actual emergency.

#### **Why did you need to test the system?**

Periodic testing of public alert and warning systems assesses the system and identifies any needed improvements. Public safety officials need to be sure in times of an emergency or disaster, they have reliable methods and systems that will deliver urgent alerts and warnings to the public. Conducting a regional test supports the continued use, training, and improvement of the WEA system.

#### **What types of alerts are sent through WEA?**

There are three types of messages sent through WEA: extreme weather and other threatening emergencies in an area, AMBER alerts, and Presidential alerts during a national emergency.

#### **What is the WEA test message that will appear on my cell phone or enabled mobile device?**

“This is a test of the Arlington County Wireless Emergency Alerts System. No action required.”

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### **How will I know the difference between WEA and a regular text message?**

WEA includes a special tone (some describe it as quite loud) and a vibration, both repeated twice. A text message also appears on the mobile device.

### **How does WEA work?**

Authorized national, state or local government authorities may send alerts regarding public safety emergencies — such as evacuation orders or shelter-in-place orders due to severe weather, a terrorist threat or chemical spill — using WEA. The alerts from authenticated public safety officials are sent through [FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System \(IPAWS\)](#) to participating wireless carriers, which then push the alerts to cell phones and enabled mobile devices in the affected area.

### **How are WEA alerts delivered to the public?**

Authorized officials select the coverage area(s) which best match the location of an emergency. All WEA-enabled mobile devices in the target location can receive the alert, even if they are roaming or visiting from another state. In other words, a customer visiting from Richmond or Detroit would receive alerts in Washington, D.C., as long as he/she has a WEA-enabled mobile device in the alert zone. The public does not sign up to receive a WEA message; it is automatically deployed through the jurisdiction's WEA system.

### **Who receives a WEA alert?**

Each jurisdiction participating in the exercise will draw their geo-targeted map. We are 100 percent certain cell phone or enabled mobile devices located outside, but near, our jurisdiction will receive the WEA alert because this technology uses carrier towers. Closer to rural areas, bleed over may be significant (up to five miles) and in densely populated areas, it's less (up to one mile). Officials take issuing a WEA seriously — so if you receive a WEA, follow the protective actions and immediately turn to local news for more details. During an actual emergency officials are committed to providing critical life-saving information; therefore, there is no exclusivity to this responsibility. We want to ensure the safety of the public which means we will communicate as much as possible in as many ways as possible.

### **Will a person receive multiple WEA alerts?**

It is very likely based on a person's location between 10-11 a.m. on Thursday, April 5, that he/she will receive multiple WEA messages. For example, a person attends a coffee meeting at 10:00 a.m. in Alexandria, at 10:30 a.m. drives to Arlington and 11:00 a.m. heads to D.C. for another meeting. As a person navigates around the NCR during 10-11 a.m., they will receive multiple messages.

### **Does a member of the public sign up for WEA alerts?**

No, if a person's WEA-enabled cell phone or mobile device is located in the target location, an alert will be received. A person does not sign up to receive a WEA alert.

### **What is the difference between a WEA alert and Arlington Alert?**

WEA is a short text message designed to capture your attention — emergency officials currently only have 90 characters for the message. Arlington County sends updates using [Arlington Alert](#), an alert system that you elect to sign-up for that allows the County to contact you through text, email, cell phone, home land line, work phone, instant messaging or fax. Messages sent through Arlington Alert often include more in-depth details about a critical event.

### **Will I be charged for receiving WEA messages?**

No. This service is offered for free.

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### Does WEA know where I am? Is it tracking me?

No. A WEA message is broadcast from area carrier towers to mobile devices in the area. Every WEA-capable phone within range receives the message, just like emergency weather alerts you see on local TV. WEA, like the TV station, doesn't know who is tuned in.

### Are consumers able to receive WEAs on a prepaid phone?

According to the FCC, consumers with prepaid phones can receive WEAs as long as their provider has decided to participate in WEA and the customer has a WEA-enabled device. These consumers receive the alerts just as customers with paid, monthly service do.

### How will I receive alerts if I don't have a WEA-capable device?

WEA is one of the many ways emergency officials will communicate with you during an emergency. Other sources include NOAA Weather Radio, news broadcasts, the Emergency Alert System on radio and TV and [Arlington Alert](#).

### I received the alert later than others/or not at all. Why?

There are numerous reasons a person may not receive the WEA test:

- 1) Some participating carriers may offer WEA on some, but not all, of their mobile devices. Consumers should check with their wireless carriers to find out if their cell phone is WEA-capable.
- 2) When the test is deployed, a person is taking a call on their cell phone.
- 3) If apps are running, you may not receive the audible alert.
- 4) Participation in WEA by wireless carriers is widespread but voluntary. Some carriers may offer WEA over all or parts of their service areas or over all or only some of their wireless devices. Other carriers may not offer WEA at all. Even if you have WEA-enabled device, you would not receive WEAs in a service area where the provider is not offering WEA or if your device is roaming on a provider network that does not support the WEA service. Consumers should check with their wireless carriers to determine the extent to which they are offering WEA.
- 5) It's possible you may have turned off the WEA notification on your cell phone. To determine if the alert is on or off, you could try (based on the version of your phone):

iPhone*	Android*
Launch the Settings app on your iPhone. Tap on Notification Center and scroll all the way to the bottom. Under the Government Alerts section, toggle the AMBER Alerts or Government Alerts option on or off to enable or disable them.	To review status, go to Settings, click on the More option under the Wireless & Networks section, and scroll down to the Cell Broadcasts settings. Once opened, you will be able to see if disable extreme threats, severe threats, and Amber Alerts are selected.

\*This depends on the version of a person's phone. Older versions of phones will have different paths to settings.

### I'm an international visitor to the NCR. Will my phone receive a WEA?

Cell phones from major manufacturers such as Apple, Samsung and LG receive WEA regardless of where the device was purchased. This is possible because WEA are broadcast from area carrier towers to mobile devices in the area.

### How geographically precise is WEA?

When the WEA program launched, participating wireless providers were generally required to send the alerts to a geographic area no larger than the county or counties affected by the emergency situation. As of November 2017, all participating wireless providers are required to transmit alerts to a geographic area that best approximates the area affected by the emergency situation, even if it is smaller than a county.

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Beginning November 30, 2019, participating wireless providers must improve geo-targeting of alerts even further.

**How can I find out more information about WEA?**

The FCC offers this guide: <http://transition.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/wea.pdf>

**Who can I contact to find out more information about the WEA test in my jurisdiction?**

Contact Jennifer Meyers, Chief Watch Officer & Public Information Officer, Arlington County Department of Public Safety Communications & Emergency Management, for more information: [jmeyers@arlingtonva.us](mailto:jmeyers@arlingtonva.us) or 703-254-7163.