

A Note on WEA: When Technology Works

Andrew Berg

I'm sometimes amazed when things work as advertised, especially when it comes to technology.

The weather in Wisconsin can be unpredictable to say the least. In the late spring and early summer months, everything from golf-ball-sized hail to tornados are a possibility and in either case, you don't want to be caught off guard.

It's for this reason I was glad to see the FCC's recently implemented Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) actually did what it's supposed to do.

After watching a red and orange blob on the radar engulf the city of Madison and subsequently drop about an inch of rain per hour on our vicinity, I received a WEA at exactly the same time our television began to warn of impending flash floods.

WEA, which was originally coined the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) or Personal Localized Alerting Network (PLAN), worked that day and to my surprise perfectly in sync with legacy systems like the ominous beeping alerts that daytime soap opera watchers in the Midwest know all too well.

WEA is one of those rare instances where a number of players - regulators, government, first responders, carriers - got a lot of moving parts to fit together and the results are truly impressive, to the extent that they could actually save lives.

According to the FCC, consumers will receive only three types of alerts: those issued by the President; alerts involving imminent threats to safety or life; and Amber Alerts.

Carriers that participate in the program can allow subscribers to block all but Presidential alerts, but in all cases, I'm happy to receive these messages. They're geographically relevant down to a specific county and in all cases likely more important than the random shot of a friend's dinner plate at the new sushi restaurant.

A lot of times we report on advances in technologies without actually seeing them in action, so I find it refreshing to actually see the rhetoric materialize as a working product. And kudos to all four major U.S. carriers for getting behind this one.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/25/2015 - 7:36pm):

<http://www.wirelessweek.com/blogs/2014/06/note-wea-when-technology-works>

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Published on Wireless Week (<http://www.wirelessweek.com>)
