



EMERGENCY MESSAGES GO MOBILE

As our unsettled spring weather sets in many Nevada residents will hear an unusual sound from their cell phones. The sharp piercing tones will be similar to the sounds of the Emergency Alert System activations you normally hear on the radio or television, but instead of the radio or TV, these tones will come from the back pocket or purse where you keep your cell phone and your phone will display a brief weather warning message.

That's because the major cell phone services are now providing Wireless Emergency Alerts or WEA's to their subscribers as part of a new public safety initiative from the federal government. The Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) is a public safety text message from federal, state or local officials and is provided for free through most major wireless companies. The service includes warning messages issued by the National Weather Service as well as AMBER Alerts and other EAS or public safety messages.

However, these cell phone text messages will be very brief, limited by the number of characters that the system can handle. Most will end with instructions to tune to your local media for more information so you should still be familiar with your local radio and TV news stations and make sure battery powered radios remain part of your emergency preparedness kits.

The cell phone companies started rolling out the WEA program last year beginning with the larger markets. It is already credited with one successful AMBER Alert recovery in Minnesota where a woman received an alert on her phone and called police after seeing the suspect's car. Cell phone alert messages were also sent during Superstorm Sandy and during the blizzards that have pounded the east coast this winter.

Cell phone companies used to provide AMBER Alert text messages if customers had signed up for the program. WEA replaces that system and you don't need to sign up again. In addition, you will receive other emergency messages sent by federal, state and local officials on your WEA-compatible cell phones. To determine if you have a phone that is WEA-capable and that your provider is part of the WEA program you can check your provider's website for more information or use this URL to link to the Wireless Association's® website for more information:

http://www.ctia.org/consumer_info/safety/index.cfm/AID/12082

WEA is one of the new warning technologies available now as a result of the use of CAP or Common Alerting Protocol, the platform that the Federal Emergency Management Agency or FEMA chose as the standard for issuing warnings and other life-saving information in disasters and emergencies. In Nevada, state and local emergency officials are learning how to use CAP technology to issue WEA messages, weather warnings, AMBER Alerts and EAS activations.

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