

RANKING MEMBER LAURA RICHARDSON (D-CA)
OPENING STATEMENT

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications
Committee on Homeland Security

**Communicating With the Public During Emergencies: An Update on Federal
Alert and Warning Efforts**

July 8, 2011

A key component of emergency preparedness is the ability to alert and warn the public of an impending disaster.

The Integrated Public Alerts and Warnings System (IPAWS) has been designed to do just that by enabling alerts to be sent via audio, video, text, and data alert messages. These alerts will have the ability to be sent to residential telephones, websites, pagers, email accounts, and cell phones, in addition to traditional broadcast media.

We all know the important role that emergency alerts play in saving lives.

Most recently, it played a key function in alerting local citizens about the devastating tornados in Missouri and Alabama.

As the Representative of the 37th Congressional District of California, I represent a large number of constituents whose families were directly affected by the American Samoa tsunami disaster in 2009.

I have heard numerous stories about families having little time to respond to the massive waves headed to the island.

Sadly, failures in providing sufficient warning systems have led to less people having the ability to seek shelter prior to a storm surge.

Examples here at home and abroad echo the need for enhanced alert and warning capabilities that can leverage the numerous ways citizens receive information– including through text, email, TV, and social media.

Through a fully functional IPAWS system and coordination between our Federal, State, and local governments, commercial carriers, broadcasters, and other preparedness stakeholders, we will be in a better position to utilize this innovative technology and ultimately save lives.

I am aware of the good work that FEMA has done with IPAWS through our oversight efforts last Congress.

Last Fall I was proud to host an IPAWS Demonstration Event for my colleagues.

The demonstration provided a clear example of the capability of the IPAWS aggregator to disseminate an alert to multiple devices via multiple modes.

I encourage continued efforts to work with FEMA's Office of Disability and Integration Coordination and other disability stakeholders to ensure that new alert and warning technologies meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities are often the most at risk in times of crisis.

That's why I plan to re-introduce the "Disability Integration and Coordination Improvement Act," which will ensure the federal government has the resources it needs to protect all Americans from impending disasters, including our nation's most vulnerable.

The importance of protecting these communities is critical to our emergency preparedness goals.

This is why I applaud the FCC and FEMA's efforts in ensuring our nation's early warning systems are inclusive of the needs of people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, the great progress of IPAWS over the past two years can be derailed due to budget cuts on the Federal, State, and local levels.

The IPAWS reduction proposed in FEMA's FY12 budget request will delay retrofitting Primary Entry Point (PEP) Stations, including one in Los Angeles that would directly affect my district and over 20 million citizens.

PEP Stations serve as the primary source of initial broadcast for a Presidential or national EAS message. I am interested in hearing how we can move forward with retrofitting the PEP stations without negatively affecting our alert and warning capabilities.

Additionally, this Congress has proposed a number of devastating cuts to grant programs that support State and local emergency preparedness efforts including alert and warning systems.

The increased intensity of natural disasters combined with our need for continued readiness for potential terrorist attacks requires investments, not cuts, to our State and local partners.

I am interested in learning how alert and warning capabilities will be affected if cuts to these critical grant programs continue.