Australian Capital Territory

Emergencies (Emergency Alert) Commissioner's Guidelines 2019

Notifiable Instrument NI2019 – 23

made under the

Emergencies Act 2004, s 11 (Commissioner may make guidelines).

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1. Name of Instrument

This instrument is the *Emergencies (Emergency Alert) Commissioner's Guidelines 2019.*

2. Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after it is notified.

3. Commissioner's Guidelines

I make the Commissioner's Guidelines relating to the use of the Emergency Alert telephone warning system at Schedule 1.

4. Revocation

I revoke NI2012–19 *Emergencies (Emergency Alert) Commissioner's Guidelines 2012*.

Dominic Lane AFSM
Commissioner
ACT Emergency Services Agency

15 January 2019

Schedule 1

ACT EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCY

COMMISSIONER'S GUIDELINES

relating to

the use of Emergency Alert by the ACT Emergency Services Agency

2019

1. PURPOSE

1.1 To provide Commissioner's guidelines to describe the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) arrangements for the use of the Emergency Alert (EA) system.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 EA is the national telephone warning system. It sends voice messages to landline telephones and text messages to mobile telephones within a specific area, alerting persons within that area about likely or actual emergency events.

2.2 EA is a component of an integrated and comprehensive public warning methodology:

a. Under the Emergencies Act 2004, the Commissioner, Emergency Services Agency (the Commissioner) has the responsibility to emphasise the importance of communicating information, advice and warnings to the community during an emergency.

b. The Commissioner has designated under the *Community Communication and Information Plan* that the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) will be responsible to ensure arrangements are in place for the coordination and deployment of ACT Government resources for the provision of community communication and information.

c. The Commissioner's Guideline - *Concept of Operations for bush and grass fires in the Australian Capital Territory*, further details protocols to ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of warnings and public information, including the use of Emergency Alert.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR USE OF EA

3.1 Circumstances in which EA must be considered include:

d. the potential for loss of life and/or a major threat to a significant number of properties;

e. when the community is required to take urgent action due to the time and scale of the potential impact;

f. when large sections of the community need to be notified of a potential threat, such as catastrophic fire danger conditions, and which may also include national security matters.

g. When a State of Alert or a State of Emergency has been declared under the Emergencies Act 2004.

3.2 The principles for the use of EA are at Attachment A.

4. SYSTEM CAPABILITIES

4.1 Emergency Alert provides the ability to send warning messages to landlines and mobile phones to individuals within a particular area. Each use of the system is known as a Campaign.

4.2 EA is not an "opt in" system, with the system designed to send messages to all phones within the targeted area.

4.3 Messages will:

a. warn targeted areas of the ACT community of potential or imminent threats from emergency incidents; and
b. direct those warned to other sources of information and/or direct them to move away from an imminent hazard or threat.

4.4 Campaigns will utilise pre-planned message templates that comply with the National Guidelines and the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP). Principles for messaging are at Attachment B. Message templates will be maintained by the ESA Risk and Planning Section.

5. AUTHORISING AN EMERGENCY ALERT CAMPAIGN

5.1 An Incident Controller or Service Duty Officer may recommend to the Commissioner the need to issue an EA Warning.

5.2 Authorisation to issue an EA Warning will be given by the Commissioner in the first instance or if unavailable, the Chief Officer of a Service.

5.3 Where time permits, the Commissioner may liaise with the Operational Advisory Group in relation to the issue of an EA warning.

6. MANAGING AN EMERGENCY ALERT CAMPAIGN

6.1 Operational procedures for the use of EA will be maintained by the ESA Risk and Planning Unit.

6.2 Role of the Incident Controller

6.2.1 If the recommendation to use EA is made by a Service Duty Officer, an Incident Controller must be appointed.

6.2.2 The Incident Controller is responsible for managing the EA campaign, including:

(a) Establishing the necessary roles to undertake and manage the EA campaign, including the activation of an EA Operator and a Public Information Coordinator (PIC);
(b) Defining the extent and type of message to be delivered;
(c) Gaining authorisation to issue the EA warning;
(d) The activation of supporting emergency management functions.

6.2.3 It is recommended the EA campaign be undertaken at ESA Incident Management Facilities (ESA HQ Fairbairn) to provide the necessary supporting personal and infrastructure.

6.2.4 EA is a component of an integrated and comprehensive public warning process. The ACT Public Information Coordination Centre (PICC) will be activated if EA is used due to the potential for a significant number people receiving messages and the need to support them in their actions with additional information and advice through other media.

6.2.5 Other areas of government may need to be involved in the management of outcomes associated with the use of EA, for example, when the messages directs the relocation of sections of the community. The ACT Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) will be activated if EA is used.

6.2.6 The ESA Emergency Management Duty Officer will undertake whole of government notification if EA is used.

6.3 Role of the EA Operator

6.3.1 The EA Operator will undertake the technical processing of an campaign using the EA software under direction of the Incident Controller or their delegate

6.3.2 Performance considerations associated with using of EA are identified at Attachment C. Where these matters are relevant to the delivery of the campaign, the operator should ensure the Incident Controller or delegate is aware of possible constraints or limitations.

6.3.3 Activation of an EA Operator will occur by the Lead Agency contacting the ESA Emergency Management Duty Officer (EMDO). The ESA Risk and Planning Unit will maintain a register of operators who are deemed trained and competent as EA Operators, for use by the EMDO.

6.3.4 An EA Operator may also be made available through the EMDO for use on a pre-emptive arrangement based on identified risk factors, such as elevated fire danger conditions or potential flooding.

6.3.5 On request through the EMDO, the ESA may assist in the provision of trained EA Operators to support the ACT Policing in delivering a campaign for a policing matter. ACT Policing will have in place internal arrangements for the authorisation and notification of EA for use in a policing matter. The ESA commissioner will be advised when ACT Policing use EA.

6.4 Role of the Public Information Coordinator

6.4.1 The PIC will support the Incident Controller in the management of the EA campaign.

6.4.2 The PIC will coordinate the arrangements to manage the public information requirements associated with the EA campaign. These arrangements must

commence with the initial decision to use the system and include the provision of public information through other media channels to support the warning issued.

6.4.3 An EA warning may have an impact on E000 and Access Canberra call centres, and these functions need to be notified, and where necessary supported with appropriate information and advice.

6.5 Monitoring

6.5.1 Once an EA message has been released, real-time monitoring of the transmission of the warning is available. Monitoring will be provided by the EA Operator using EA system tools.

6.5.2 Reports on this monitoring will be fed back to the Incident Controller and PIC in order to facilitate further warning message decisions.

6.6 Closure

6.6.1 In consultation with the Incident Controller, the PIC will ensure that the community is clearly advised when the threat has eased or ended.

6.6.2 Closure of an incident may be undertaken using EA, or other public information mechanisms.

6.7 Backup Arrangements

6.7.1 The Emergency Alert system is operated using Telstra infrastructure. Primary access to undertake an EA campaign is through the ACT Government network linking to the Telstra infrastructure via fixed fibre connections.

6.7.2 In the event the fixed line infrastructure is not available, the system may be accessed by the 4G Mobile Networks.

6.7.3 The ACT ESA Commissioner may also request other jurisdictions (principally NSW agencies) to undertake a campaign over the ACT.

6.7.4 The ESA will undertake regular testing of Emergency Alert, including the fixed line and 4G capabilities.

7. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR EMERGENCY ALERT

7.1 The ESA Commissioner's Executive Leadership Group will be the ESA forum for internal oversight, reporting and policy arrangements for the use of EA.

7.2 Management of the EA system and infrastructure related to the ACT will be undertaken by the ESA Risk and Planning Unit, who will be responsible for:

(a) coordinating and managing policies dealing with the use of EA in ACT;
(b) reviewing this guideline and its associated procedures;
(c) System testing and the contact point for maintenance;
(d) capture of EA costs including measures for accountability and;
(e) record-keeping and reporting.

7.3 Training

7.3.1 Ongoing training and familiarisation on the use of the system will be provided to EA Operators on the use of this system by the ESA through the ESA Risk and Planning Unit.

7.3.2 EA may also be used as part of incident management exercises undertaken by the ESA using the EA training platform.

7.3.3 The ESA will continue to assist in training and competency maintenance for ACT Policing EA Operators.

Attachment A

Principles for the Use of Emergency Alert (EA) in the ACT ESA

1. EA is a component of an integrated and comprehensive public warning methodology and will not be used as a standalone warning measure.
2. Warning mechanisms such as door knocking, use of the broadcast media, social media and internet will continue to be used in the ACT to warn communities in danger.
3. In some situations, where the immediate provision of warnings to members of the community is required, the issuing of warnings using EA may not always be possible, and the community should not rely on an EA warning being issued in all circumstances.
4. Where possible, EA messages will direct the community to official information sources on which to act.
5. Agencies issuing emergency warnings must consider the consequences of the warnings.
6. Agencies shall have arrangements in place to accommodate outcomes, e.g. updating information available on official websites and arranging for the rostering of additional resources to manage increased call volume.
7. Acknowledge an EA warning may have an impact on 000 and Access Canberra. The PIC must ensure process for advising ComCen, Access Canberra, Service Duty Officers and are in place
8. Other directorates may need to be involved in consequence management processes associated with the use of EA, particularly when the use includes the relocation of sections of the population.
9. When the risk of the emergency reaches an acceptable or manageable level the community should be notified. It is an option to use an EA message to close an incident; however, it may be a more efficient use of resources to use other methods for closing an incident with a community which has received a message via EA.

Attachment B

Message Construction and Templates

Warnings are intended to achieve two distinct outcomes – to inform the community of an impending or current threat, and to promote appropriate actions. Agencies need to be very clear about whether they need to achieve one or both of these outcomes when drafting a warning.

Messages should be worded to prompt appropriate community response and/or action. Warning content and format must:

a. be simple, arresting and brief;
b. be suited to the needs of the community;
c. be worded in accordance with advice from the relevant agencies; and
d. utilise appropriate templates.

Warnings should reflect the principles outlined in the Commonwealth policy paper *Emergency Warnings – Choosing Your Words (2008).*

The ACT ESA has pre-planned message templates which have designed to be used for a wide range of potential warnings. These template comply with the National Guidelines and the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) to assist in the timely development and dissemination of warnings to the community.

Pre-planned templates have been developed for both text and voice messages consistent with system capabilities.

Attachment C

Performance Considerations

The performance of the EA system will be affected by a number of factors:

- the number of campaigns that are initiated and running at any one time;
- the volume and number of fixed line and mobile services that will be sent a campaign message;
- the complexity of GIS Shapes that are defined and confirmed by EA Operator;
- whether a 'threat direction' has been applied to a campaign;
- the number of queries to the Location Based Number Store (LBNS) which are performed (note: each time a polygon is confirmed, a query to LBNS is performed);
- the number and size of reports that are being requested from the EA Application;
- the amount of any photographic/satellite views that are used in the maps and the frequency at which users zoom in and out of maps;
- the length of the message to be sent to fixed line services;
- the length of the SMS message to be sent to mobile services i.e. a maximum of 160 characters;
- the campaign validity time;
- the time taken to authorise a campaign;
- in commercial and industrial areas, the use of Private Automatic Branch Exchanges (PABX) may significantly increase the number of fixed lines identified through the LBNS;
- the occurrence of "historical" numbers, where details have not been updated or disconnected, particularly if the target covers a telephone exchange; and
- the number of times a user utilises the speech translation preview function and time it takes to validate that message.

Other factors affecting performance that should be considered by Users include:

- the priority assigned to each campaign. A warning message will have a higher priority than other message types, such as those for information and advice;
- the number of failed messages to fixed line services (including where the service is busy, there is no answer, answered by an answering machine and where the service is a fax machine or telemetry device);
- whether messages are to be delivered to fixed line services, mobile services or both;
- the number of fixed line congestion events which are detected during a campaign;

- whether there is extremely high use of the SMS network by the general public at certain key times and dates (for example, around midnight on New Year's Eve, Christmas Day, Mother's Day and where there are major events being held in a particular location);
- the likelihood of a campaign area experiencing high usage of the network due to an existing emergency, event or incident, which will be increased by the targeted sending of emergency warning messages from the EA Application;
- in areas where there is poor mobile coverage and a power failure occurs, warning messages can only be received by people with access to a landline phone with a cord; i.e. not a cordless phone nor a combined phone/fax machine; and
- Telstra has no control over the performance of other carrier's networks.