

Language Style Guide

Introduction

Access to timely and relevant information is important to everyone, especially during emergencies. Effective alerts and warnings are those that result in members of the public taking recommended actions to protect themselves. To ensure that messages are effective when delivered to the whole community, it is critical to include multiple languages and formats. This information needs to be understood, consumable, and actionable by all Californians, including the estimated 7 million for whom English is not their primary language.

To address this issue, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) has created this Language Style Guide to assist alerting authorities. The Guide is a key resource in the issuance of multilingual emergency notifications in a manner reflective of the key linguistic features of the source emergency notifications templates. This style guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the Wireless Emergency Alert Library of translated Emergency Notification Language Templates available on the [CalAlert.org](https://www.calalert.org) website.

Nothing in this guide is intended to conflict with, or supersede, any existing arrangement for dissemination of public alerts and warnings by local, state, or federal agencies.

Background

Emergency notifications must be accessible to, and understandable by, diverse populations to effectively relay information regarding threats or hazards. Messaging should be clear, consistent, and linguistically appropriate.

The state of California is comprised of many diverse communities, some of which include individuals with Limited English Proficiency. Identifying the most commonly used languages and having a process in place to translate warning messages, will ensure the greatest number of individuals understand the warnings being sent. It is important, however, to not let the inability to translate a message delay notification when time is of the essence and lives are at risk.

California Code of Regulations §8594.16 specifies that emergency notifications issued to the public shall be translated into two of the most commonly spoken languages other than English in any impacted county or counties.

Written correspondence is typically more formal than verbal communication. Therefore, certain considerations are called for when communicating in languages other than English. For example, when utilizing translation services, it is preferable to contract with local translators. There are multiple world language interpreting and translation service providers.

Jurisdictions should identify a world language service providers and establish contracts for

services prior to any disaster to ensure timely and effective communication during events. Language service contracts should be available 24/7 to bridge any communication gaps quickly, efficiently, and in an attentive manner during steady state and in times of crisis. Jurisdictions should be aware that written English and target languages present differently due to certain basic concepts for writing. Examples include:

- Use of capital letters in headlines,
- Use of capital letters in general (languages have different grammar rules),
- Some punctuation marks that have different usages (colon, dash, etc.),
- References to seasonal conditions in the source (for example, "Last summer, the agency..." considering "summer" resonates to a different time of the year for certain cultures.)
- Names of agencies, including acronyms, should remain untranslated and include a description of the service provided, as needed.
- In some cases, there is no equivalent term. In this case, provide the original name and an appropriate equivalent in parenthesis.

General Rules

Jurisdictions are encouraged to establish a message library with sample messages that have been translated into the languages most commonly used in the communities that they serve. Pre-planned messages can save time in a disaster and ensure accurate translations exist for messages that are critical for the community.

For this determination of translated emergency notifications and prescript templates, the following apply:

- Do not translate names of agencies, programs, or proper names.
- Do not translate locations, streets, cities, counties, etc.
- Do not translate signage, or acronyms.
- Do not translate names of cooling/warming centers, evacuation shelters, distribution or dispensary locations, or names.
- Do not translate web addresses, email addresses, or hyperlinks.
- Avoid slang, jargon, or metaphors.

Applying concepts found in this Language Style Guidelines will help to enable all Californians to have lifesaving information in a language or format that is accessible and understandable to them.

Definitions and Abbreviations (English)

Access and Functional Needs (AFN): As defined in Government Code section 8593.3, access and functional needs refers to individuals who have developmental, intellectual, or physical disabilities; chronic conditions or injuries; limited English proficiency or non-English speaking; Or, individuals who are older adults, children, or pregnant; living in institutional settings; low- income, homeless, and/or transportation disadvantaged; or from diverse

cultures.

Advisory: Highlights special conditions that are less serious than a warning, shelter in place, or evacuation. They are for events that may cause significant inconvenience, and if caution is not exercised, it could lead to situations that may threaten life and/or property.

Agency Representative: A person assigned by a primary, assisting, or cooperating federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local government agency or private entity that has been delegated authority to make decisions affecting that agencies or organization's participation in incident management activities following appropriate consultation with the leadership of that agency.

Agency: A division of government with a specific function offering a particular kind of assistance. In the Incident Command System (ICS), agencies are defined either as jurisdictional (having statutory responsibility for incident management) or as assisting or cooperating (providing resources or other assistance).

Alert: A communication intended to attract attention and warn of a danger or threat.

Alerting Authority: Public officials that are granted the authority to alert the public of emergency situations through Federal, State, and local laws. These are designated in a local Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Emergency Alert System (EAS) plan, and within a signed Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Alerting Originator: Alerting Originators are designated individuals who have been designated the authority and have the training to draft and distribute the alert and warning message through the approved notification systems.

Alert Origination Tool: Alert origination tools are software products used by emergency managers, public safety officials, and other alerting authorities to create and send critical lifesaving messages to the public or to other emergency management officials for collaboration.

AMBER Alert: The **AMBER Alert Program** is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and the wireless industry, to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases. AMBER alerts are one of the three categories of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA).

American Red Cross: The American Red Cross, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers and guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement, will provide relief to victims of disaster, and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.

Authority: The power or right to give orders and/or to make decisions. Authority may be delegated from one entity to another.

Civil Danger Warning (CDW): A warning of an event that presents a danger to a

significant civilian population. The CDW, which usually warns of a specific hazard and gives specific protective action, has a higher priority than the Local Area Emergency (LAE) (e.g. contaminated water supply, terrorist attack). Public protective actions could include evacuation, shelter in place, or other actions (such as boiling contaminated water or seeking medical treatment).

Civil Emergency Message (CEM): An emergency message regarding an in-progress or imminent significant threat(s) to public safety and/or property. The CEM is a higher priority message than the Local Area Emergency (LAE), but the hazard is less specific than the Civil Danger Warning (CDW).

Common Terminology: Normally used words and phrases—avoiding the use of different words/phrases for same concepts—to ensure consistency and to allow diverse incident management and support organizations to work together across a wide variety of incident management functions and hazard scenarios.

Communications/Dispatch Center: Agency or interagency dispatch centers, 911 call centers, emergency control or command dispatch centers, or any naming convention given to the facility and staff that handles emergency calls from the public and communication with emergency management/response personnel.

Complex Fire: Two or more individual incidents located in the same general area which are assigned to a single incident commander or unified command.

Cooling Center(s): Facilities that are made available by public, private, and volunteer organizations as a heat relief station. There is no agreement that these facilities will be exempt from power outages.

Disaster: The occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property, or significant adverse impact on the environment, resulting from any natural or technological hazards, or a terrorist act, including but not limited to fire, flood, earthquake, wind, storm, hazardous substance incident, water contamination requiring emergency action to avert danger or damage, epidemic, air contamination, blight, drought, infestation, explosion, civil disturbance, or hostile military or paramilitary action.

Emergency: A suddenly occurring and often unforeseen situation which is determined by the Governor to require state response or mitigation actions to immediately supplement local government in protecting lives and property, to provide for public health and safety, or to avert or lessen the threat of a disaster. Local government's adaptation of this definition connotes an event that threatens or actually does inflict damage to people or property, exceeds the daily routine type of response, and still can be dealt with using local internal and mutual aid resources.

Emergency Assistance: Assistance which may be made available under an emergency declaration. In general, Federal support to State and local efforts to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC): The physical location at which the coordination of

information and resources to support incident management (on-scene operations) activities normally takes place. An EOC may be a temporary facility or may be located in a more central or permanently established facility, perhaps at a higher level of organization within a jurisdiction. EOCs may be organized by major functional disciplines (e.g., fire, law enforcement, medical services), by jurisdiction (e.g., Federal, State, regional, tribal, city, county), or some combination thereof.

Exercise: An exercise is an instrument to train for, assess, practice, and improve performance in prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery capabilities in a risk-free environment. Exercises can be used for testing and validating policies, plans, procedures, training, equipment, and interagency agreements; clarifying and training personnel in roles and responsibilities; improving interagency coordination and communications; improving individual performance; identifying gaps in resources; and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Evacuation – The action of evacuating a person or a place.

Freeze: A freeze is when the surface air temperature is expected to be 32°F or below over a widespread area for a climatologically significant period of time.

First Responders: Refers to individuals who in the early stages of an incident are responsible for the protection and preservation of life, property, evidence, and the environment, including emergency response providers as defined in Section 2 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 101). It includes emergency management, public health, clinical care, public works, and other skilled support personnel (e.g., equipment operators) who provide immediate support services during prevention, response, and recovery operations.

Flood: An overflowing of a large amount of water beyond its normal confines, especially over what is normally dry land.

Hazard: Something that is potentially dangerous or harmful, often the root cause of an unwanted outcome.

Hazard Probability: The estimated likelihood that a hazard will occur in a particular area.

Hazard Risk: A quantitative product of the probability of a hazard occurring and the projected consequence of the impact.

Hurricane: A storm with a violent wind; a wind of force 12 on the Beaufort scale (equal to or exceeding 64 knots or 74 miles per hour)

Imminent Threat Alert: “Imminent Threat” is one of the three categories of Wireless Emergency Alerts. Imminent Threat alerts must meet specific criteria for urgency, severity and certainty.

Incident Command System (ICS): A standardized on-scene emergency management construct specifically designed to provide for the adoption of an integrated

organizational structure that reflects the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. ICS is the combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure, designed to aid in the management of resources during incidents. It is used for all kinds of emergencies and is applicable to small as well as large and complex incidents. ICS is used by various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private, to organize field-level incident management operations.

Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS): In the event of a national emergency, the President will be able to use IPAWS to send a message to the American people quickly and simultaneously through multiple communications pathways. IPAWS is available to United States Federal, State, local, territorial and tribal government officials as a way to alert the public via the Emergency Alert System, Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), NOAA Weather Radio and other National Weather Service dissemination channels, the internet, existing unique warning systems, and emerging distribution technologies.

Jurisdiction: A range or sphere of authority. Public agencies have jurisdiction at an incident related to their legal responsibilities and authority for incident mitigation. Jurisdictional authority at an incident can be political or geographical (e.g., city, county, state or federal boundary lines) or functional (e.g., police department, health department).

Jurisdictional Agency: The agency having jurisdiction and responsibility for a specific geographical area, or a mandated function.

Law Enforcement Warning (LEW): A warning of a bomb explosion, riot, or other criminal event (e.g. a jailbreak). An authorized law enforcement agency may blockade roads, waterways, or facilities, evacuate, or deny access to affected areas, and arrest violators or suspicious persons.

Local Area Emergency (LAE): An emergency message that defines an event that, by itself, does not pose a significant threat to public safety and/or property. However, the event could escalate, contribute to other more serious events, or disrupt critical public safety services. Instructions, other than public protective actions, may be provided by authorized officials. Examples include a disruption in water, electric or natural gas service, or a potential terrorist threat where the public is asked to remain alert.

Local Government: Public entities responsible for the security and welfare of a designated area as established by law. A county, municipality, city, town, township, local public authority, special district, intrastate district, council of governments (regardless of whether the council of governments is incorporated as a nonprofit corporation under State law), regional or interstate government entity, or agency or instrumentality of a local government; an Indian tribe or authorized tribal entity, or in Alaska a Native village or Alaska Regional Native Corporation; a rural community, unincorporated town or village, or other public entity.

Major Disaster: As defined under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency

Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122), a major disaster is any natural catastrophe (including any hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, or drought), or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood, or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under this Act to supplement the efforts and available resources of States, tribes, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby.

Major Disaster Declaration (Federal): A declaration by the President of the United States based upon criteria and authority described in the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended. The Presidential declaration of a major disaster is warranted when a hazard impact “causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant Federal disaster assistance to supplement the efforts and available resources of States, local governments, and the disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering.” Funding comes from the President's Disaster Relief Fund, which is managed by FEMA, and the disaster aid programs of other participating Federal departments and agencies. A Presidential major disaster declaration triggers long-term Federal recovery programs, some of which are matched by State programs, and designed to help disaster victims, businesses, and public entities.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): An agreement document between two or more parties outlined in a formal document. It is not legally binding but signals the willingness of the parties to move forward with a contract laying out the guidelines under which each party will operate.

Mitigation: The capabilities necessary to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.

Mutual-Aid Agreement: Written agreement between agencies and/or jurisdictions that they will assist one another upon request, by furnishing personnel, equipment, and/or expertise in a specified manner.

National Warning System (NAWAS): A communication system of the federal government which provides warning to the population of an attack or other national emergency. Reception is at local and state warning points.

National Weather Services (NWS): Federal government agencies charged with weather related reporting and projections.

NOAA Weather Radio: "The voice of the National Weather Service" - NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts National Weather Service warnings, watches, forecasts and other hazard information 24 hours a day. It is provided as a public service by NOAA. The NOAA Weather Radio network has more than 480 stations in the 50 states and near adjacent coastal waters, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and U.S. Pacific Territories.

NOAA Radio's Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME): provides in a digital format specific, timely information on the nature and location of a threat to the safety of those most immediately at risk from severe weather or other hazards. Its greatest value is to significantly improve the automatic selection and distribution of messages about events that threaten people and/or property.

Non-Weather Emergency Message (NWEM): NWEM refers to emergency messages for the public about hazardous events that are originated by government organizations other than the National Weather Service, but still utilize NWS alert dissemination services.

Operational Area: the county and its sub-divisions with responsibility to manage and/or coordinate information, resources, and priorities among local governments and serve as the link between the local government level and the regional level.

Planned Event: A scheduled nonemergency activity (e.g., sporting event, concert, parade, etc.).

Point of Dispensing (POD): A designated area to distribute medications and vaccinations and provide risk communication and public information during a public health emergency. A Point of Dispensing may be a "closed" POD operated by a hospital to distribute medications to their patients and staff or an "open" POD used to distribute medications to the general public. A Point of Dispensing may also be a centralized location where the public obtains life-sustaining commodities following a disaster, including shelf stable food and water.

Point of Distribution (POD): A designated area to distribute medications and vaccinations and provide risk communication and public information during a public health emergency. A Point of Distribution may also be a centralized location where the public obtains life-sustaining commodities following a disaster, including shelf stable food and water.

Presidential Alert: A Presidential Alert is one of the three categories of Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) messages that is reserved for use of the President of the United States in the event of a national emergency.

Public Information: Processes, procedures, and systems for communicating timely, accurate, accessible information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation; resources committed; and other matters of general interest to the public, responders, and additional stakeholders (both directly affected and indirectly affected).

Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS): A preventative measure of last resort if an electric utility reasonably believes that there is an imminent and significant risk that strong winds may topple power lines or cause major vegetation-related issues leading to increased risk of fire.

Situational Awareness: Is the ability to identify, process, and comprehend the essential information about an incident to inform the decision-making process in a continuous and timely cycle and includes the ability to interpret and act upon this information.

Shelter in place: Take immediate shelter where you are—at home, work, school, or wherever you can take protective cover. It may also mean "seal the room"; in other words, take steps to prevent outside air from coming in.

Severe Weather Potential Statement: This statement is designed to alert the public and state/local agencies to the potential for severe weather up to 24 hours in advance. It is issued by the local National Weather Service office. This could be used to make citizens aware of non-weather situation.

Severe Weather Statement: A National Weather Service product which provides follow up information on severe conditions which have occurred or are currently occurring. Could use a Statement for evacuation or shelter-in-place updates.

Threat: Natural or manmade occurrence, individual, entity, or action that has or indicates the potential to harm life, information, operations, the environment, and/or property.

Warming Centers: - a short-term emergency shelter that operates when temperatures or a combination of precipitation, wind chill, wind and temperature become dangerously inclement.

Warning: Communication intended to persuade members of the public to take one or more protective actions in order to reduce losses or harm.

Wildfire: A large, destructive fire that spreads quickly over woodland or brush.

Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA): Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) were established pursuant to the Warning, Alert and Response Network (WARN) Act under Federal Communication Commission (FCC) rules. Alerting authorities can broadcast WEAs to cellular carrier customers with compatible mobile devices located in the geographic vicinity of cellular towers serving an affected area.

Volcano: A mountain or hill having a crater or vent through which lava, rocks fragments, hot vapor, and gas are being or have been erupted from the earth's crust.