

## **EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION AND WARNING ANNEX**

### **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this Annex is to facilitate the coordination of timely emergency information across departments, agencies, partners, and to the general public. It describes the methods by which emergency alerts and warnings are communicated to the public and incidents that trigger the activation of the Larimer County Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

### **II. Scope**

The provisions set forth in this Annex support the Larimer Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and applies to all county departments, offices, staff and elected officials. This annex includes the following messaging types:

1. Everbridge Emergency Notifications
2. Everbridge Emergency Information Updates and EOC Notifications
3. Social media
4. Website notifications
5. Media releases
6. Door-to-door notifications

### **III. Primary and Supporting Agencies**

1. Primary Agencies
  - a. Larimer County Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center
2. Supporting Agencies
  - a. All Other Larimer Public Safety Answering Points
  - b. Larimer County Office of Emergency Management
  - c. Larimer County Sheriff's Office
  - d. Larimer County Public Relations Office
  - e. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority
  - f. Larimer Emergency Services Agencies

### **IV. Authorities:**

- Larimer County Emergency Management Resolution establishing the Office of Emergency Management and its authorities, 2015
- Larimer County Code, Disaster Preparedness, revised 2015
- Colorado Revised Statutes Title 24, Article 33.5 Section 7, Colorado Disaster Emergency Act
- Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, P.L. 93-288, as Amended

### **V. Assumptions**

- This Annex is intended to address initial emergency messaging to the public and across county departments, as well as ongoing communication during a prolonged incident.

- If an incident occurs suddenly and the situation evolves rapidly, information may be incomplete or unconfirmed.
- While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the notification systems the county uses, the successful delivery of messages is heavily dependent on external networks and providers outside the county's control.
- The county's emergency notification system is in addition to other notification systems used by neighboring jurisdictions, schools and universities or other public or private organizations.
- Various factors can influence the public's response to an emergency message:
  - Interpretation of message – when different people listen to the same message, there may be a variation in what they hear or how they understand the message, leading to different interpretation and response.
  - Previous experiences – often people will rely on their previous experiences with the hazard to determine what actions they initially take (or don't take).
  - Observations – individual responses to warnings vary, but most people will seek some form of confirmation. For example, some people will look for more information through environmental cues, while others will seek to contact other trusted sources.
  - Perception of risk/proximity – people tend to make a rapid assessment of the relative safety of their location. If their perception of personal risk is high, people will act quickly. If their perception is low, they may delay acting.
  - Length of residency – tourists and newcomers to the area lack knowledge of local hazards and the history of local disasters, so they may react differently.

## VI. Situation

1. Some incidents occur with enough warning that notification can be issued to ensure the appropriate level of preparation (i.e. winter weather, flood). Other incidents occur with little or no advanced warning and do not provide enough time to adequately notify the public (e.g., earthquake, tornado, fast-moving wildfire).
2. To alert the greatest possible audience at risk in an emergency requires the use of multiple systems and methods to:
  - a. Capture the public's immediate attention, regardless of their location or the time of day
  - b. Ensure important safety actions are communicated to all in the affected community regardless of language, disability or other factors inhibiting a clear understanding of the message
3. As a hazard becomes known, and based on the circumstances and conditions that evolve, choices will be made to select:
  - a. The best communications tools to use given the situation
  - b. The appropriate message content

- c. The optimum format for each message
  - d. The most effective times for releasing each message
4. Effective emergency messaging requires communication of the nature, extent and expected impact of a hazardous incident as well as clear, concise and decisive information concerning appropriate protective measures. The timely and coordinated use of public warnings can reduce the impact of hazardous incidents.
5. Each communication mode has different limitations. For example, messages sent via social media (Twitter) are limited to 140 characters. Additionally, most wireless carriers do not guarantee the timely delivery of text messages, nor do they guarantee text messages will be received at all. The public's ability to receive voicemails and emails may be disrupted if the networks are compromised by outages or high traffic volumes.
6. In general, Larimer County relies on systems established through the Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority, or other partner agencies (i.e. National Weather Service) to initiate notifications regarding emergency incidents or events.
7. PIOs from partner organizations and municipalities will post information regarding a significant incident on their respective websites or social media accounts.

## VII. Concept of Operations

The primary and support agencies to this Annex will act as a team to address emergency notification considerations to ensure the flow of information to departments, agencies and the public. Larimer County Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center, in coordination with Larimer OEM, will be the lead in initiating emergency notification and warning procedures.

1. **General** - Timely and accurate emergency notifications to the public can prevent or reduce harm. The following principles of effective risk communication govern all alerts and warnings issued by Larimer County:
  - a. Message clarity – describe the hazard or threat in accessible and direct terms
  - b. Indicate intended audience – specify the geographic area or population affected by the alert
  - c. Specify actions – tell people what they should do to protect themselves and others. Some examples include evacuating, staying indoors, avoiding a certain area or monitoring news or other information
  - d. Acknowledge impacts – specify what damage has occurred or is expected to occur as a result of the incident
  - e. Describe the response – let people know what the county and its partners are doing to manage the incident and its impacts
  - f. Manage expectations – provide timely updates and “all clear” messages when appropriate to inform the public when it is safe to resume normal activities

2. **Message Format** - When a hazard threatens public safety or creates a significant service disruption and an alert needs to be issued to the public, the Incident Commander (IC) or the EOC Manager will determine the message content, geographic area to be covered, timing of message delivery and event duration, and appropriate public warning tools. To the greatest extent practicable, alert notifications should be uniformly categorized using the following format:
  - a. Category: Geophysical, Meteorological, Security, Rescue, Fire, Health, Environmental, Transportation, Infrastructure, CBRNE, Safety or Other
  - b. Location
  - c. Brief description of hazard, intended audience and recommended protective actions.
  - d. Message expiration / hazard duration
  
3. **Notifying Larimer OEM** - Warning is a two-part function: first, learning of the hazard or threat of hazard and second, alerting officials and the public. Larimer County relies on the lead response agencies or other partner agencies to initiate notification with LCSO Dispatch of an emergency. Response organizations should also notify Larimer OEM when a significant incident or event occurs that meets any one or more of the following criteria:
  - a. Continuity of Operations (COOP) – Any situation that significantly affects the county’s continuity of operations, i.e., the ability of the county to meet routine expectations or deliver essential services
  - b. Duration – Any non-routine, unplanned incident expected to continue beyond a single operational period
  - c. Resources – Any situation that requires resources not provided by routine operational procedures or mutual aid
  - d. Media Interest – Any incident that attracts significant media attention due to social, cultural, economic, political, technical or legal impacts (on staff or the public)

If the incident requires a coordinated multi-department or multi-agency response, Larimer OEM – in discussion with the LCSO Emergency Operations Manager – will determine whether to activate the Emergency Operations Center. Additional notification of the EOC activation level and staffing requirements will be sent to EOC personnel and the Policy Group. In a partial or full activation of the EOC, Larimer OEM will notify municipal and non-governmental partners.

WebEOC - When Larimer OEM receives a notification of a significant incident or event they will log the incident in WebEOC.

- a. Larimer County Board – When an incident or event requires a coordinated response or threatens to disrupt the essential functions of the county, Larimer OEM and/or the LCSO will post a message to the Larimer County Board. This

provides situations awareness to all response agencies within the county and notifies them that an incident has occurred and support may be needed.

- b. Northeast Region Board – When the incident is large enough, the message can also be sent to the entire NE region, which will trigger additional notifications to emergency managers and emergency management partners.
- c. New WebEOC incident – If the incident or event will continue for more than one operational period or is likely to generate significant message traffic, a new incident will be created in WebEOC, after notifying all partners on the Larimer County Board of the new incident name.

#### **4. Communication Tools**

##### **a. Emergency Alerts and Notifications – Everbridge System**

- i. Larimer County can initiate SMS text, email and phone calls to residents and businesses within Larimer County impacted by, or in danger of being impacted by, an emergency or significant incident through the Everbridge system.
- ii. Everbridge is preprogrammed with published and unpublished landline numbers and opt-in cellular phone information for residents. The system cannot contact mobile phones or send emails and texts unless the individual registers the additional contact information at [www.leta911.org](http://www.leta911.org).
- iii. Everbridge use is limited to urgent incidents that require the public to take action (e.g. evacuate or stay indoors). Messaging that does not require immediate public action should be disseminated via press releases, social media and other non-emergent channels.
- iv. Everbridge provides a GIS interface that allows the dispatch center to draw a circle or polygon to define the impacted area and limit notification to that specific area.
- v. Activation of Everbridge emergency notifications may be initiated by any Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) in Larimer County.
- vi. Immediate requests to send emergency notifications by an Incident Commander (or their designee) from a fire or law enforcement agency will be initiated by the PSAP with jurisdictional authority.

##### **b. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)**

- i. WEA allows geographically targeted text-like alerts to be delivered directly to WEA-enabled mobile devices. The public does not need to sign up for this service; however, successful notification requires a WEA-enabled mobile device and participation by the wireless provider in WEA.

- ii. WEA uses a unique ring tone and vibration to signal that an alert has arrived – this is particularly helpful to people with hearing or vision-related disabilities.
- iii. WEA alerts are limited to 90 characters per message typically alerting the recipient of the type of event and recommended protective action (e.g. stay indoors, evacuate). To get more specific information the public will be directed to a website, local news or other source of information via WEA.
- iv. WEA alerts are also issued by NOAA’s National Weather Service (NWS) for imminent and severe weather conditions (e.g. tornado, blizzard warnings) in or near the county.
- v. WEA is intended to complement the EAS, which sends warnings to broadcast and satellite television and radio in the affected area.

**c. Larimer.org/emergency**

- i. When a significant incident occurs, Larimer County has the ability to post informational messages to the public within Everbridge that will automatically be sent to the Larimer OEM webpage, [www.larimerorg/emergency](http://www.larimerorg/emergency). In some instances, this information will also be sent by Larimer OEM and the LCSO to social media accounts. Typically, the LCSO is responsible for posting information to the public through this mechanism.
- ii. When an incident presents an unusual threat or requires additional attention, the OEM Director, Community Information Manager, or the LCSO PIO may post detailed information as a static banner at the top of the Larimer County homepage.
- iii. During a prolonged incident with regional impact, Larimer.org/emergency will be the focal point for providing coordinated information to the public on behalf of the Joint Information Center. PIOs from Larimer County, LCSO, municipal agencies, and regional partners will work to ensure messaging is accurate and consistent.

**d. Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)**

- i. Emergency Managers, Responders and PIOs use social media accounts to make information quickly accessible to a wide, highly mobile and interconnected public. None of these accounts are monitored 24 hours a day nor are considered a primary means of informing the public. However, Twitter and Facebook have proven to be an effective adjunct to other alerting systems. Additionally, social media is a form of two-way communication, not just an outbound channel.
- ii. In general, the Twitter and Facebook accounts for the LCSO and Larimer OEM are the primary accounts for disseminating information about the incident via Twitter and Facebook to the public.

**e. Media Releases**

- i. The lead PIO for the incident will issue media releases (in coordination with other county departments and the JIC) to advise the public of planned events, service disruptions, the appropriate response to ongoing situations, and update the status of response and coordination activities following a significant incident.
- ii. Information contained in a media release is typically posted to the Larimer County website and disseminated via social media, Everbridge informational alerts and/or other means.
- iii. Media releases are not used as the primary means of communicating urgent warnings about life threatening situations.

**f. Door-to-Door Notifications –**

- i. In the event of a significant or catastrophic telecommunications disruption, or the inability to communicate emergency information via means described in this Annex – law enforcement, fire, EMS and public works personnel may disseminate emergency information via roaming loudspeakers in emergency response vehicles or via door-to-door notifications.

**VIII. Roles and Responsibilities****b. Larimer County Sheriff's Office**

- i. LCSO Dispatch Center – Is the county's Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). LCSO Dispatch will notify the LCSO Emergency Operations Manager by SMS text via pager and/or mobile device if any of the following occur:
  1. Significant incidents or disasters involving or affecting Larimer County emergency services resources.
  2. Severe weather warnings issued by the National Weather Service, or state and national warnings received over the NAWAS for Larimer County.
- b. LCSO Emergency Operations Manager – Provides situational awareness regarding events and incidents in Larimer County, provides incident management support, and notifies Larimer OEM in the event of a significant event in the county.
- c. LCSO Public Information Officer – Work in coordination with the LCSO Emergency Operations Manager to provide public information and updates regarding significant events in Larimer County.

**b. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority**

- i. Provide general oversight of the county's emergency notification systems, including the authorization and appropriation of resources necessary to establish and maintain emergency notification and warning systems.
- ii. Provide support to the JIC and EOC as appropriate during and after significant events in Larimer County.

**c. Larimer County****i. Larimer County Office of Emergency Management**

1. Provide general oversight of the county's emergency management programs, including maintenance of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
2. Advise the Policy Group concerning emergency management needs before, during and after an emergency
3. Maintain the EOC, which helps facilitate coordination among municipal and county partners and outside agencies
4. Coordinate with the LCSO Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and LCSO PIO to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging

**ii. Board of County Commissioners**

1. Ensure availability to make critical decisions following a large-scale emergency or disaster.
2. In consultation with the County Manager, execute the major emergency or disaster declaration as appropriate.

**iii. County Public Relations Manager**

1. Coordinate with the LCSO Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and LCSO PIO to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
2. Provide support to the JIC and EOC as appropriate and requested

**IX. Resource Requirements**

Resources needed to support the effective operations under this Annex are addressed in Standard Operating Procedures developed and maintained by each Primary and Support Agency.

**X. Annex Development and Maintenance**

The Larimer Office of Emergency Management is responsible for developing and maintaining this annex. This annex will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to remain current.



**XI. References:**

- Larimer Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, 2015
- Wireless Emergency Alerts, Federal Communications Commission, <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/wireless-emergency-alerts-wea>
- Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority, [www.leta911.org](http://www.leta911.org)
- Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, Federal Emergency Management Agency, <https://www.fema.gov/integrated-public-alert-warning-system>
- National Warning System Operations Manual, Federal Emergency Management Agency, [http://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/1550\\_2.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/1550_2.pdf)