

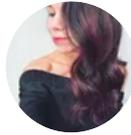


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Tech

# FEMA to Test Presidential Alert Wireless Emergency System

Trump might be able to send alerts directly to your cell phone.



BY **DE ELIZABETH**

SEPTEMBER 15, 2018

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (**FEMA** will soon be testing a new emergency alert system that will allow President **Donald Trump** to send messages directly to the majority of cell phones in the U.S., **NBC News** reports.

According to **FEMA's website**, the agency will be conducting a test of its new Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) on Thursday, September 20, at 2:18 P.M. EST. Cell phone users **will see** a message beginning with the headline “Presidential Alert,” along with the words “THIS IS A TEST of the National Wireless Emergency Alert System. No action is needed.” NBC notes that **more than 100 mobile carriers** are participating in the test, which includes AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, and T-Mobile. The agency’s memo details that **users cannot opt** out of the Presidential Alerts at this time, and users will receive the message as long as their phone is switched on, and within range of a functional cell tower.

The new WEA system will function like other emergency alerts users receive on their phones (along with the same loud tone and vibration). According to FEMA, the Presidential Alerts **will be used** to notify the public about “dangerous weather, missing children, and other critical situations.” The agency **will also be testing** its other emergency alerts on September 20, which will send messages to cable systems and television/radio broadcasts.

NBC reports that some technology experts didn’t seem to be concerned that Trump might abuse the WEA system, despite **his history** of **attacking opponents** and **spreading lies** via social media. Karen North, director of the Annenberg Digital Social Media program at the University of Southern California, **told NBC**: “If you separate

this from the politics and personality of any individual president then this is a great idea and an amazing use of technology to reach everybody if they're in harms way.”

However, other people have **expressed concern** over the **possible ways** Trump could abuse this technology. Some people have also **tweeted** their frustration about **not being able to opt out** of the alerts.

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The WEA system itself was **launched in 2012** in order to warn the public about dangerous situations. According to FEMA, **it has been used more than 33,000 times**, and enables government officials to send geographically-targeted messages to people, alerting them to threats in their area.

However, as noted by **TechCrunch**, the WEA system itself isn't perfect. In January 2018, **residents of Hawaii received emergency texts** via their cell phones, saying that a “ballistic missile threat” was headed to the state, and that all people should “seek immediate shelter.” The alert ended with the words, “This is not a drill.” Forty

minutes later, an additional message was sent to notify residents that the previous alert was a “false alarm.” Residents were understandably upset, with many noting that the alert system needed reinforcements. “I’m still shaking,” Brook Conner, a 49-year-old Hawaii resident and cyber security expert, told the *New Yorker* on the day of the alert. “What can we possibly learn from this? We need to make sure that both the alert procedure, which clearly had some problems, and response procedures...that those are all tied up.”

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