

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister Steve Whan
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister for Small Business
Minister for Rural Affairs



Emergency Alert warning system ready for NSW

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NSW emergency services have a new tool to directly warn people about major life-threatening emergencies, with the new telephone-based Emergency Alert national warning system now operational.

Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan said the national Emergency Alert system would help the emergency services protect lives in major life-threatening emergencies such as bush fires, floods and other disasters.

“This new system is another step in making sure our emergency services workers have the tools and resources they need for their vital work to protect the community, particularly as NSW faces the prospect of our worst bush fire season for some years,” Mr Whan said.

“This new system gives our authorities the ability to directly alert communities in imminent danger by telephone, telling people when there is a major life-threatening emergency, what the emergency is, and what they should do.

“Emergency Alert can be used to provide information about bush fires threatening life or property, flood evacuations or other life-threatening hazards such as explosions, smoke plumes from industrial fires or chemical spills.”

Mr Whan said Emergency Alert could deliver up to 300 text messages a second to mobile phones and 1,000 voice messages a minute to landlines.

“Warnings will be delivered via a voice message on landline telephones based on the handset’s location and a text message on mobile phones based on the subscriber’s billing address.

“With summer now on us, it’s important that people realise many bush fires spread too fast for any warnings to be issued and there will not be a warning for every fire. This new system will only be used for major life-threatening emergencies.

“This is an additional warning system. People still need to be well prepared, keep themselves informed about fire activity in their area through local radio, the RFS website and the 1800 NSW RFS information line and have their Bush Fire Survival Plans ready.”

Emergency Alert has been developed and tested over the past six months in response to an agreement by the Council of Australian Government (COAG) to enhance Australia's natural disaster arrangements. The Federal Government allocated \$15 million to develop and deliver the system.

A comprehensive public trial was conducted in Victoria, with more than 50,000 messages successfully issued to landlines and mobile telephones based on a billing address. Further testing will be carried out in a number of locations in NSW from this weekend.

Mr Whan said the Emergency Alert was one of a comprehensive package of warning tools available to NSW emergency services, including the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Fire Brigades, NSW Police Force and State Emergency Service.

"The emergency services will continue to make decisions about the best method of responding to emergencies and to warning those who might be in danger," he said.

"It may be that Emergency Alert is used in significant and life-threatening emergencies, but traditional warning methods such as doorknocks, radio messages and warning sirens will still be used."

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