This month's Issue:

Collaborative Operating Groups (COG)

A Collaborative Operating Group (COG) has an important role in the future of alert and warning. COG's are not only your identity but they allow you to be interoperable with other systems that are Common Alert Protocol (CAP) compliant. Below are some examples of what a COG can do for you so you can share information with whomever you choose. While the following sharing structure outlined here will generally be built into commercial notification software applications you will have to make the selections during the application launching process.

Private Alert Options

- Alerts within an alerting authority organization, not for public dissemination. **(Internal Alerting)**

- Alerts to other specific public safety professionals and responder organizations not for public dissemination. **(Mutual Aid Awareness)**

- General interest alerts to all public safety professionals and responder organizations, but not appropriate for public dissemination. **(Situational Awareness)**

Public Alert Options

- Alerts directed within an alerting authority's organization, but may be sent to anyone, including the public.

- Alerts to other specific public safety professional and responder organizations, and may be disseminated publicly.

- Alerts of general interest to all public safety professional and responder organizations, and may be disseminated publicly.

Public Alerts with IPAWS Push Options (This option requires alerts to be digitally signed along with other criteria)

- Alerts directed within an alerting authority's organization, but may also be sent to the public through the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS), Non-Weather Emergency Messaging (NWEM), etc. via the IPAWS-OPEN server based on content and permissions.

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- Alert to other known public safety professional and responder organizations, but may also be sent to the public through EAS, CMAS, NWEM, etc. via the IPAWS-OPEN server based on content and permissions.

- Alert of general interest to all public safety professional and responder organizations, and to the public through EAS, CMAS, NWEM, etc. via the IPAWS-OPEN server based on content and permissions.

Now that you have some ideas of what a COG can do, let's answer the question, what is a COG?

A COG is a "virtual organization composed of individual members you rely or call upon for incident or disaster response," It is also the designation you need as a local public safety agency to originate IPAWS alerts.

There are two main purposes for establishing a COG:

1) COG-to-COG communications (for sending secure alerts to other alerting authorities).
2) Both COG-to-COG *and* public alerting.

COG to COG communications does not require a **state review process** (a topic for next month's newsletter), whereas public alerting requires a

state organization to approve a local agency's designation.

For both COG to COG and public alerting, FEMA states there are three types of alerting responsibility situations: (Note: The items in yellow are work plan items for the IPAWS Committee)
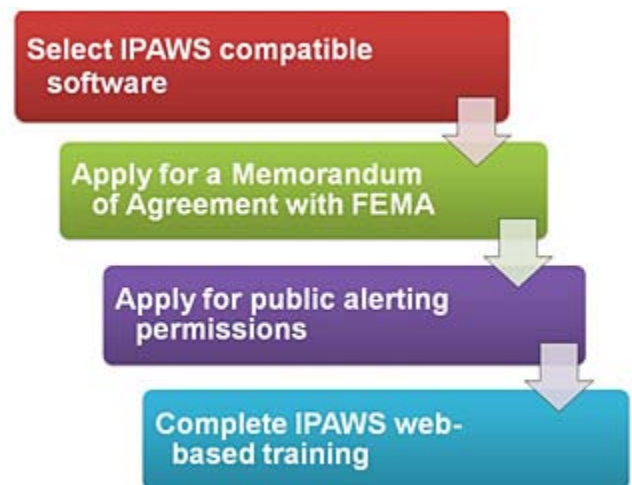
1) Locally initiated alerts, but approved by a state authority.

2) State originated and authorized alerts (no local origination).

3) Hybrid, where local alerts are initiated only for backup purposes or local jurisdiction can only originate certain types of messages.

If you have any comments on the above FEMA designations please submit them to the IPAWS committee.

How to sign up for IPAWS (Taken directly from the FEMA IPAWS Alerting Authority page):

Select IPAWS compatible software

Apply for a Memorandum of Agreement with FEMA

Apply for public alerting permissions

Complete IPAWS web-based training

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A federal, state, local, tribal or territorial alerting authority that applies for authorization to use IPAWS is designated by IPAWS as a Collaborative Operating Group or "COG." Each COG administers individual member accounts through its software system. (i.e. Code Red, Web EOC, Disaster LAN, etc.)

Step #1 – Select IPAWS compatible software

Access to IPAWS is free; however to send a message using IPAWS, an organization must procure its own IPAWS compatible software. Software should be successfully tested in the IPAWS OPEN test environment. Consult your software developer to ensure your system is IPAWS OPEN compatible. Or, for a list of private sector developers, visit the IPAWS OPEN Developers list ([PDF](#))

Step #2 – Apply for a Memorandum of Agreement with FEMA

To request a COG, a Memorandum of Agreement governing system security must be executed between the sponsoring organization and FEMA. Each MOA is specifically tailored to the sponsoring organization and interoperable software system. Please download the MOA application, review the instructions, complete and return to ipaws@dhs.gov. Please indicate in the subject line of the email "Operational COG Application."

MOA Application ([PDF](#))

Step #3 – Apply for public alerting permissions

Alerting authorities that want to send alerts to the public through IPAWS must complete an application defining the types of alerts they intend to issue and the extent of their geographic warning area. The Application for IPAWS Public Alerting Authority will be provided when you apply for a COG MOA, along with contact information for a designated state reviewer. In order to ensure consistency with state public alerting plans, the application must be reviewed and signed by a designated state official before it is submitted to FEMA.

Step #4 – Complete IPAWS web-based training

FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) offers the independent study course, [IS-247 Integrated Public Alert and Warning System](#). The goal of the course is to provide authorized public safety officials with:

- Increased awareness of the benefits of using IPAWS for effective public warnings.

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- Skills to draft appropriate, effective, and accessible warning messages.
- Best practices in the effective use of Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) to reach all members of their communities.

The course should take approximately two hours to complete and is a prerequisite for full access to IPAWS OPEN for the purpose of public alerting. FEMA does not provide training on third-party authoring software. You will have to contact your vendor for any software support questions.

Completing the application

The FEMA COG Coordinator will prepare and return the MOA for signature after it is submitted. After being signed by the applicant, the MOA will be routed for FEMA signatures. Once executed, a COG identification and digital certificate will be generated and implemented in IPAWS OPEN. A copy of the executed MOA and COG ID will be returned to the sponsoring organization. Additionally, the COG ID and digital certificate will be provided in order to configure the IPAWS compatible software system. Once the Public Alerting Application and web-based training is complete, specific alerting permissions will be implemented in IPAWS OPEN. At that point the individual members specified by the COG will be able to send alerts and warnings in the geographically prescribed areas.

IPAWS Committee Update

On March 15, the first IPAWS Committee meeting lead by Committee Chair Ulie Seal was held at the MN DOT Training Center in Arden Hills. The newly formed committee met and went over the mission, charter and work plan. The committee has a lot of work ahead of it. Chair Ulie Seal commented that change won't happen fast, but with proper prioritization it will happen. The committee will meet the third Thursday of each month. The IPAWS Committee Web page is being populated with more information every week so use the link above to keep up with committee information on membership, agendas, training links and more. If you would like to receive information about the committee meetings and actions sign, up for the MN-IPAWS electronic mailing list.

Next Issue:

State Review Process for COG's

National Weather Service "HazCollect" system

Contact Information and Resources

Alert and Warning Page

http://hsem.dps.mn.gov

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