



NEWS RELEASE

Bruce Gordon, Director of Communications

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CONTACT:

Julie Anderson 651-201-7576

ALERTS COMING TO NEW CELL PHONES

ST. PAUL — Minnesotans will now be able to receive time-sensitive, critical information about severe weather, emergencies, and disasters with the next generation of emergency alerts on their smart phones and cell phones. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are location-specific so recipients will receive an alert based on their current geographical location, not where they live.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety will be ready to send imminent threat public safety alerts by the end of the week. The National Weather Service will be ready to send severe weather alerts in the next week or two.

“Time is critical in an emergency and warnings using this new technology will help people take action to be safe,” said Kris Eide, director of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Division of Homeland Security Emergency Management (HSEM). “Adding cell phone alerts to the current mix of outdoor warning sirens and notification by television and radio will save lives.”

The emergency alerts will include what action the recipient should take. For example the alert message will let recipients know there is a tornado warning for a particular area and those in the area are advised to seek shelter.

“It is important to have weather warnings available in many different formats that include instruction on what protective action to take,” said Todd Krause, Warning Coordination Meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Chanhassen.

WEAs will look much like a text message on newer-model phones; cell phones will vibrate and sound a tone. The 90-character-or-less text message is free and uses different technology than actual text messages which means the alerts will get through when traditional text messages may not due to high-volume messaging during an emergency.

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HSEM will use the new technology in the unlikely event of a public safety concern involving an incident at one of Minnesota's two nuclear generating plants or a major hazardous materials spill.

Eventually county Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPS) will be able to issue more localized alerts. Staff will be trained to only use the Wireless Emergency Alerts in urgent situations.

The President of the United States will use the Wireless Emergency Alert system in a time of national urgency. Cell phone users may not opt out of presidential alerts but may opt out of Amber Alerts and state and local alerts.

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