



October 15, 2020

Terrence Woods  
State Chief Information Officer  
Office of the State CIO

Dear Mr. Woods,

The Oregon Fire Chiefs Association (OFCA) strongly recommends funding for the implementation of a single Alert, Warning, and Notification System across the State of Oregon. It is our hope that a solution can be developed collaboratively in the interest of improving Oregon's preparedness and response to all emergencies.

OFCA represents nearly 400 Fire Chiefs, Chief Officers, and fire service leaders, and is one of numerous organizations and stakeholders engaged with the State Interoperability Executive Council (SIEC) to evaluate Oregon's various emergency alerting systems. As part of this work, the group reviewed the devastating 2017 Camp Fire in Northern California's Butte County. Reports from the Camp Fire indicate multiple failures of the alerting system that contributed to the high death toll. Because of these failures, a majority of residents in the affected areas received no alert at all.

When Oregon's alerting framework was examined by comparison, it became evident that similar issues, including significant coverage gaps, incompatible technology, and limited reliability or training, are widespread. Reviewers representing various agencies and organizations agreed: the disparate systems currently in place lack the needed interoperability, functionality, and reliability to alert residents and visitors during times of emergency. The review group had developed this position in advance of the devastating Oregon wildfire events of September 7-10.

Following the September fires, as reports and findings continue to be compiled, one outcome remains consistent: the current integration of warning and alert systems has failed to achieve the desired results. In numerous examples, alerts were not timely, were never issued, nor were they distributed in a manner recognizable by the general population. Lives may have been lost because residents were not notified in time to evacuate. While this is only a speculation, the very possibility motivates us to do everything in our power to improve the Alert, Warning, and Notification System before the next emergency occurs. This experience has exposed the limitations of the existing emergency alert systems, and prompted new scrutiny regarding their application. The path of action is clear: we must make improvements.

As such, the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association supports the realization of a single, interoperable emergency alert platform and encourages the requisite funding.

Thank you for your consideration and your dedication to building a safer Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Charlton", written over a circular scribble.

Fred Charlton, President  
Oregon Fire Chiefs Association