

**MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SOLICITOR GENERAL
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT BC
BRIEFING NOTE FOR DECISION**

TO: Tara Richards, Deputy Minister, Emergency Management BC

ISSUE: Expanding Provincial Public Alerting Capacity to Additional Hazards.

BACKGROUND:

First Nations and Local Governments are responsible for providing emergency notifications for imminent or unexpected threat to life caused by severe weather disturbances, natural disasters, or other emergencies.

The typical channels include:

- going door-to-door (i.e. first responders, volunteers, etc.)
- sirens (primarily for tsunami related alerts)
- social media channels (including Facebook and Twitter)
- official websites and news releases
- signage providing direction; and
- subscription based notifications (user must sign-up to service)

Broadcast Intrusive (BI) alerting would prove valuable for hazards such as wildfire where timeliness and reach are important to achieving public safety objectives. BI messages are broadcast to everyone within the broadcast area to Radio/TV and/or wireless devices which would increase to reach and timeliness of alerts.

Emergency Management BC (EMBC) has the authority to issue BI alerts in BC through the National Alert Aggregation and Dissemination System (NAAD) using the Alert Ready system. The Province currently only uses BI alerts for tsunami warnings. Within BC, the RCMP also has Alert Ready access for the purpose of issuing AMBER Alerts.

While the Alert Ready system is already being used by BC, a program has not yet been developed by EMBC to allow for Local Authorities and First Nations to deploy BI alerting for hazards within their jurisdictions such as wildfires.

BI Alerts to wireless devices are typically used for the most serious alerts. There is also a need to consider how information related to developing emergencies or serious alerts from other areas can be shared (i.e., such as through an app, social media, or other channels) to support public safety objectives.

DISCUSSION:

- EMBC has been working to implement BI alerting since 2014 over which time the capacity of alerting solutions has matured.
- The BC alerting environment is complex as there are 193 Local Authorities and 203 First Nations for a total of almost 400 alert issuers.
- Many Local Authorities and First Nations have invested in their own subscription-based notification services which are used for a variety of purposes including emergency related messaging.
- There are significant operational considerations to determine how to best administer the delivery of a BI alerting system including:
 - hazards in scope (wildfire, flooding, landslide, volcanic hazards – such as Pemberton valley)
 - responsibility for alerting where there is jurisdictional overlap
 - centralized versus decentralized program delivery model
- Another important consideration in respect to the program design is the capacity of Local Authorities and First Nations to participate in the program recognizing many communities have limited capacity which could result inconsistent alerting timelines.
- Further, the choice of a devolved versus central delivery of the program could lead to regional inequities.
- The implementation of a BI alerting program expanded to additional hazards requires emergency management systems (including WebEOC, Rave Alert, BC Common Operating Picture) to be integrated to support:
 - Accurate contact management
 - User authentication and validation for Alerting requests
- EMBC is working to implement a new incident management system – WebEOC, which will provide ready access to the foundational Local Authority and First Nations information required to manage an alerting program.
- A time-limited regional pilot would allow EMBC to develop and test an Alerting Program in a phased manner which would reduce the risk associated with this complex project.
- Initial consultation with the Pelmorex Corporation as of July 27, 2021, have provided contacts across Canada. EMBC staff are in the process of connecting with other Provincial government's public alerting staff to evaluate approaches and identify potential resources which could be retained to support advancing this work.
- The lack of subject matter expertise and defined scope has resulted in little progress being made toward implementing a Public Alerting Solution.
- Specifically, the focus on alerting for 'all emergencies,' rather than those that were most significant, overcomplicated the problem set resulting in no clear path forward.
- Implementing a BI solution will require a commitment to funding the expertise required to develop the program in addition to supporting the ongoing operations.

- An investment in capacity at EMBC is required to maintain situational awareness and administer an alerting program.^{s.13}
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- This is in addition to dedicated resources to support the development and rollout of a phased program. See attachment 1 for additional details.
- EMBC could absorb these costs within its based budget given these expenditures align with the mitigation program objectives.
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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CONSIDERATIONS:

- First Nations communities would benefit from a BI Alerting system.
- There are jurisdictional complexities that would need to be worked through in respect to the use of BI Alerting.
- EMBC will need to work closely with First Nations, the First Nations Emergency Services Society, Indigenous Services Canada, and other parties to implement BI Alerting capacity for Indigenous communities.

OPTIONS:

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OTHER MINISTRIES IMPACTED/CONSULTED:

- TBD

RECOMMENDED OPTION APPROVED
or **OPTION 1 APPROVED**

DATE:



Tara Richards
Deputy Minister
Emergency Management BC

August 10, 2021

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REVIEWED BY:

	Initials	Date
ADM	AC	2021/08/10
ED		
Pgm Dir/Mgr		

Attachment(s)

Attachment 1: s.12

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