Wireless Emergency Alerts

In weather emergencies, warnings can save lives. But traditional warning methods such as television, radio, and outdoor sirens don't reach everyone.

Emergency officials now have a new way to send warning directly to cell phones in affected areas—Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs).

These short messages—less than 90 characters—may look like a text message, but unlike texts, which are sent directly to your phone number, these warnings are broadcast to all phones within range of designated cell towers.

The alerts will tell you the type of threat or warning, the time it goes into effect, when it was issued, the issuing agency, and the time it will expire. You'll need to turn on other sources, such as television or your NOAA All-Hazards Weather radio, to get more detailed information about what is happening and what actions you should take.

For illustration only. Actual message appearance may vary.

Key Things to Know:

- WEA messages may look like a text, or appear over your home screen.
- The alert message will include a unique ringtone and vibration.
- You will never be charged for WEA messages.
- Emergency alerts will not interrupt any calls or downloads in progress. If you are on the phone when the alert goes out, you will get the message when you end your call.
- You need not have GPS or any other special features turned on to receive the alerts.
- The system does not identify your location or phone number—it simply send the message to all devices in a given area.
- If you are on the road and enter an area with an active warning, you will receive a WEA message as soon as you come within range of one of the affected cell towers.

Is your phone ready for WEA ?

If you have an older model phone, you may not receive the Wireless Emergency Alerts. This feature comes installed on newer cell phones. Check with your service provider to find out if your phone is WEA-capable.

WIRELESS EMERGENCY ALERTS CAPABLE

weather.gov/riverton

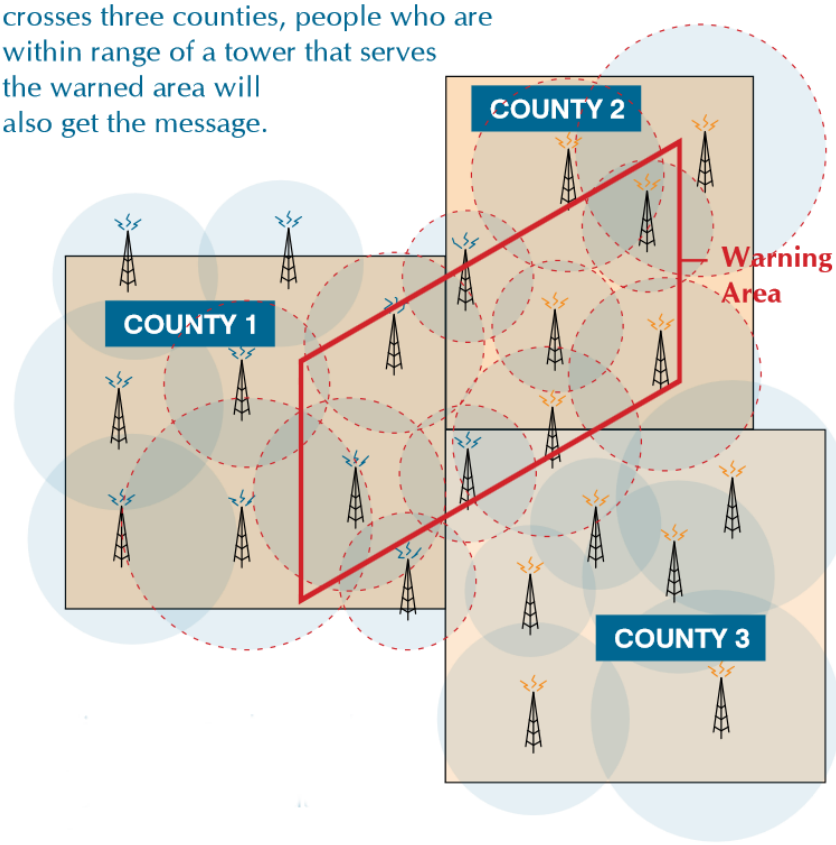
Cell tower geography may lead to some overwarning

Cell towers broadcast in a radius, or circle, so their coverage areas do not align neatly with county boundaries or warning polygons. This means you may receive warnings if you are on the outskirts of the warned area.

The alerts are delivered directly from cell tower to cell phone through a one-way broadcast. The system does not rack or locate individual cell phones or phone numbers—it simply broadcasts to all phones within range. Unfortunately, in some cases, this may result in overwarning.

For example, when a tornado warning is issued for a particular area, it will go to all towers that serve that area. Towers in urban areas generally serve a radius of two to five miles, and in rural areas up to 10 miles, so the warning message may reach a little beyond the actual warning boundaries.

As this simplified illustration shows, when a warning is issued for a polygon that crosses three counties, people who are within range of a tower that serves the warned area will also get the message.



Wireless Emergency Alerts: Three Types of Warnings

The Wireless Emergency Alert System can be used to broadcast three types of emergency alerts:

- **Presidential Alerts**—Issued by the U.S. President in the event of a nationwide emergency.
- **Imminent Threat Alerts**—Typically issued by the National Weather Service; in Wyoming these could include both tornado warnings ("extreme") and flash flood warnings ("severe").
- **Amber Alerts**—Issued by law enforcement to share information about a child abduction.

No president has issued a presidential alert, but should one become necessary, cell phone providers are required to broadcast it to all WEA-capable phones.

Cell phone users may choose to opt out of imminent threat and/or AMBER alerts, but the procedures allow customers to opt out of one or the other—or opt out of severe warning but still get extreme alerts—while others only allow you to opt out of both. Contact your wireless provider for more information.

It is recommended that residents not opt out of receiving these potentially life-saving messages.

To learn more, contact your local emergency management office or wireless service provider.