



**Municipal Affairs and Housing
Office of the Minister**

PO Box 216, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3J 2M4 • Telephone 902-424-5550 Fax 902-424-0581 • novascotia.ca

July 16, 2024

To Mayors and Wardens:

Re: Coordination on Emergency Alert System

As the province grapples with another devastating loss of life and incredible infrastructure damage, it is important that we reiterate the important role we all play in ensuring that Nova Scotians have appropriate, timely and necessary information in cases of emergencies.

We have seen all too well that emergencies are dynamic situations. They can develop quickly and without warning.

Currently, the only way a municipal emergency alert is issued by the Province is when a municipality requests one. Under the current policy procedures, the municipality sends a form with the text of the alert to the Shubenacadie Radio Communications Centre, who liaises with EMO, enters it into the system and issues the alert. The Province does not veto requests.

We feel very strongly that since municipalities are the closest to critical events as they unfold, local municipal leaders, elected officials and senior staff are best positioned to understand their capacity on the ground and thus the need for the issuance of an emergency alert.

If a municipal request isn't received, an alert doesn't get issued.

All of that said, last week something extremely rare happened. The Province took the unusual step of issuing an alert without a request. In that case, no municipal request was received, requiring the Province to bypass the municipal systems and directly issue the alert.

As you may be aware, there is legislation before the House surrounding emergency alerts that will set the course well into the future. This legislation includes the establishment of the Nova Scotia Guard, establishment of a municipally funded network of Regional Emergency Management Organizations (REMOs) across the Province and a modernized emergency management and alert system. Over the course of the summer, there is extensive outreach and consultations taking place. Following the input from the consultation process, it is our expectation that this legislation will pass in the fall.

In the interim, as the Minister responsible for the current Emergency Measures Act, I am taking the following immediate steps:

1. All municipalities continue to be authorized to request the issuance of an alert and we ask them to be more vigilant in issuing alerts.

From a provincial perspective, we are changing things to make the process as streamlined as practical. Specifically, we are eliminating any internal interaction with the alert and making the process more direct. There will be no wording checks, no content checks and no potential to slow down the issuance. Ultimately, this means that the municipality will make the decision, contact the Shubenacadie base and the base will simply move the alert to the Pelmorex platform and from there it will be sent out.

The alert system is a critical tool in an effective emergency response. Alerts will be issued within 15 minutes of receiving a request. We ask that you reach out this week to schedule refresher training for appropriate municipal staff as necessary.

2. We are also requesting that the RCMP and HRP review their internal policies and update/remove any internal policy that restricts their use of the alert system and instead ask that they proactively expand their use of the system to include any public safety situations they may be aware of (for example, flooding risks).
3. We are also expanding access to the alert system to include all municipal police forces, fire services and other first responders.

These categories of organizations have previously not had the ability to directly request that an alert be issued. This is a policy change. The goal is to have more access to the alert system.

We will be reaching out to these organizations to schedule training. We recognize that some organizations may be reluctant to accept this responsibility and authority. This is normal but the reality is that they play an important role and in many emergency situations their members are the first to recognize and assess any risk to public safety. They can play a critical role in saving precious time by issuing a necessary alert directly.

Finally, our EMO team and I will begin to more aggressively issue alerts, even when the municipality has not requested one. This is a policy change in that in the absence of a timely municipal response, the Province will proceed with issuing the alert using the validated information available to them.

Please understand that in these situations, time is of the essence and the Province may not have time to fully consult municipalities before acting. This provision will remain in place until municipal capacity has increased to the point where emergency alerting will be implemented at the REMO level.

As noted in my letter to you in the Spring, this new, impending legislation is built on significant engagement with Nova Scotians over the past year and focuses on three key areas: communication, coordination and volunteer management.

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Combined, these efforts will result in greater preparedness, impact, and efficiency before, during and after any emergency.

Provincial staff will be in contact to discuss the new protocol with your Chief Administrative Officers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John A. Lohr".

Honourable John A. Lohr
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

c: Chief Administrative Officers