

Writing effective Emergency Mobile Alerts

This document is intended to support people who have responsibility for writing Emergency Mobile Alerts. It summarises information provided in the GNS Science Report *Recommendations for New Zealand agencies in writing effective short warning messages*¹. This document should be read in conjunction with the *Emergency Mobile Alert User Handbook* and *Emergency Mobile Alert Protocol for User Agencies*.

Content to include in an EMA message

Content	Description
Source	Agency issuing the EMA message. Spell the name out in full. Avoid using acronyms.
Hazard	State what the hazard is. Describe the hazard characteristics (e.g. speed of the hazard and whether it is spreading) and location (e.g. the geographical area it will cover and origin of the hazard).
Impacts	Describe what might happen to people and property as a result of the hazard.
Guidance	State the actions people need to take to protect themselves. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
Location	The geographical area the message is for. Be as precise as possible and use well-known location names so people receiving the message understand who is, and who is not, likely to be affected by the hazard.
Time	State when people need to take action or have responded by. Include the time the EMA was issued. Write time in 12-hour format (e.g. 3:26pm), not 24-hour format.
Link	Include a link to where people can find more information about the event and what they need to do.

Recommended order of message content

Research shows that the recommend order of content differs depending on the message length. However, it is more important for messages to be specific and clear. Use the recommended order as a guide, but if it means the message is becoming confusing, change the order.

Length of message	Recommended order
Up to 150 characters	Source, guidance, hazard, impacts, location, time
Between 151 and 500 characters	Source, hazard, impacts, location, time, guidance
Between 501 and 930 characters	Source, hazard, impacts, guidance, location, time

¹ Potter SH 2018, Recommendations for New Zealand agencies in writing effective short warning messages. GNS Science Report 2018/02. Lower Hutt, New Zealand. https://shop.gns.cri.nz/sr_2018-002-pdf/

Review the message

Is the message useful?

- Does the message include source, hazard, impacts, guidance, location and time?
- Is there a link to further information?

Is the message specific enough that people will know whether it relates to them or not?

- Are locations described at the finest scale possible?
- Will the location description be understood by message recipients (including tourists)?

Is the message clear and likely to be understood?

- Is the language simple and clear?
- Does the message avoid using acronyms and jargon?

Are the actions people should take achievable, affordable and effective to reduce the risk?

Is the message accurate, with no spelling or grammatical mistakes?

Further reading and resources

Potter, S., (2018). *Recommendations for New Zealand agencies in writing effective short warning messages*. GNS Science Report 2018/02. https://shop.gns.cri.nz/sr_2018-002-pdf/

Potter, S., (2024, July 18). *7 key things to include in an effective short warning message*. Canary Innovation. <https://www.canaryinnovation.com/post/7-key-things-to-include-in-an-effective-short-warning-message>

Emergency Mobile Alert Protocol for User Agencies.

<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/documents/ema/EMA-Protocol-for-User-Agencies-v1.0.pdf>

Emergency Mobile Alerts Explained: A guide for media.

<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/documents/media/EMA-Explained-A-Guide-for-Media-May-2023-Pages.pdf>

Consistent Messages for CDEM. <https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/consistent-messages>