

Federal Communications Commission
Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau

Preliminary Report:

Hawaii Emergency Management Agency's
January 13, 2018
False Ballistic Missile Alert

January 30, 2018

Public Safety & Homeland Security Bureau

Status of Investigation

- At 8:07 AM on January 13, 2018, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) issued a false ballistic missile alert through the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) System. Chairman Pai immediately called on the Bureau to investigate.
- To date, the Bureau has interviewed key stakeholders, including:
 - HI-EMA employees
 - Representatives of other emergency management agencies across the country
 - Alert origination software vendors (including the vendor who supplies HI-EMA)
 - Wireless service providers
- The Bureau's investigation is ongoing.

Events Leading Up to the False Alert

Time	Events
0805	• HI-EMA's midnight shift supervisor begins a no-notice ballistic missile defense drill at a shift change by placing a call, pretending to be U.S. Pacific Command, to the day shift warning officers. • The midnight shift supervisor plays a recording over the phone that properly includes the drill language "EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE," but also erroneously contains the text of an EAS message for a live ballistic missile alert, including the language, "THIS IS NOT A DRILL." The recording does not follow the script contained in HI-EMA's standard operating procedure for this drill. • The day shift warning officers receive this recorded message on speakerphone. • While other warning officers understand that this is a drill, the warning officer at the alert origination terminal claimed to believe, in a written statement provided to HI-EMA, that this was a real emergency, not a drill.
0807	• This day shift warning officer responds, as trained for a real event, by transmitting a live incoming ballistic missile alert to the State of Hawaii. • In doing so, the day shift warning officer selects the template for a live alert from a drop-down menu, and clicks "yes" in response to a prompt that reads, "Are you sure that you want to send this Alert?"

Events After the False Alert

Time	Events
0808	Day shift warning officer receives false WEA on mobile device
0809	HI-EMA notifies Hawaii Governor of false alert
0810	HI-EMA to U.S. Pacific Command and Honolulu PD: no missile launch
0812	HI-EMA issues a cancellation, ceasing retransmission over EAS, WEA
0813	HI-EMA begins outreach, but its phone lines become congested
0820	HI-EMA posts on Facebook, Twitter – “NO missile threat to Hawaii”
0824	Hawaii Governor retweets notice that there is no missile threat
0827	HI-EMA determines that an EAS, WEA Civil Emergency Message (CEM) is the best vehicle for correction
0830	FEMA confirms HI-EMA's view on CEM; Hawaii Governor posts correction on Facebook
0831	HI-EMA supervisor logs into alert system, begins to create false alert correction
0845	HI-EMA issues correction through EAS and WEA that there is no missile threat

Preliminary Findings

1. A combination of human error and inadequate safeguards contributed to the transmission of this false alert.
2. HI-EMA's lack of preparation for how to respond to the transmission of a false alert was largely responsible for the 38-minute delay in correcting the alert.
3. HI-EMA has taken steps designed to ensure that an incident such as this never happens again.

Next Steps

- The Bureau will continue its investigation and issue a final report, including recommended measures to safeguard against false alerts and to mitigate their harmful effects if they do occur.
- After the issuance of the final report, the FCC will partner with FEMA to engage in stakeholder outreach and encourage the implementation of best practices.
- Federal, state, and local officials must work together to prevent such a false alert from happening again.