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LETTER REPORT: Impact of National Public Alerting System Common Look and Feel Guidance

INTRODUCTION

1. The National Public Alerting System (NPAS) is “a multi-channel Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) all-hazards system that provides emergency management organizations throughout Canada with a standard alerting capability to warn the public of imminent or unfolding hazards to life through such means as radio, cable television, satellite television, email and SMS text services”¹.
2. The purpose of the National Public Alerting System Common Look and Feel (CLF) Guidance 1.0 document² is to provide guidance to broadcasters and other last mile distributors of what the FPT alerting community would like to see as to the format and audio and visual display of emergency alert messages presented to the public.
3. The Guidance document was produced at the request of the Canadian Public Alerting Common Look and Feel Working Group (CLF WG) by the Centre for Security Science. The CLF WG is a public-private working group of FPT alert issuers, alert aggregators, last mile distributors, and other interested parties. The mandate for the CLF WG comes from the FPT Public Alerting Working Group established by the Senior Officials Responsible for Emergency Management (SOREM); SOREM’s current activities related to public alerting are outlined in the Action Plan of the Communications Interoperability Strategy for Canada (CISC)³.

METHODOLOGY

4. Information was provided on the current specifications related to NPAS. This includes the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), an international standard which is the message protocol adopted for use in NPAS⁴, the Canadian Profile of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP-CP), which was developed to address alerting issues specific to Canada⁵, and the SOREM “Broadcast Immediate” Layer⁶ which specifies if an immediate and life threatening situation warrants an immediate interruption of television, radio or other programming.

¹ National Public Alerting System <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/mrgnc-mngmnt/mrgnc-prprdncss/ntnl-pblc-lrtng-sstm-eng.aspx>

² NPAS Guidance Document <http://www.capan.ca/index.php?/en/npas/>

³ Communication Interoperability Strategy and Action Plan <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ntrprblt-ctn-pln/index-eng.aspx>

⁴ Common Alerting Protocol <https://www.oasis-open.org/standards#capv1.2>

⁵ Canadian Profile of the Common Alerting Protocol <http://www.cap-cp.ca/index.php/en/>

⁶ SOREM Broadcast Immediate Alerts <https://alerts.pelmorex.com/highpriorityalerts/>

5. Guidance was provided to broadcasters on CAP Message Elements, official language considerations, alert message length/duration, alerting attention signal, repeat distribution of audience alert messages, alert message expires/cancelation, multiple alert audience messages, broadcast immediately guidance, delineation of alerts with polygons, speed of delivery and audio content consideration info blocks. Medium specific considerations were also provided for television and radio. Future guidance was provided to expand the use of CAP elements to provide last mile distributors with a selection of messages of different length and specific to the medium.

6. The guidance document was technically reviewed by the CLF WG which includes key representatives from last mile distributors (television and radio operators), and FPT Alerting issuers. Policy and technical oversight was provided by Public Safety Canada and the Centre for Security Science.

RESULTS

7. The guidance document was presented and endorsed by the SOREM FPT Public Alerting Working Group in April 2013 and the National Alert Aggregation & Dissemination (NAAD) System Governance Council in June 2013. The document has also been recognized by the Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and the Broadcaster Technical Coordinating Committee (BTCC). The guidance document provides key information that enables alert issuers and last mile distributors to issue alerts in a common format. The ultimate outcome of this guidance is to ensure as many Canadians as possible receive clear warnings of life-threatening events from public safety authorities as soon as possible.

8. To further advance public alerting in Canada, on September 11, 2013, FPT Ministers Responsible for Emergency Management "...agreed to request that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission take steps to ensure that Canadian commercial broadcasters and cable and satellite companies be required to broadcast emergency alerts."⁷ It is anticipated that a forthcoming letter from FPT Deputy Ministers Responsible for Emergency Management to the CRTC acknowledging the Ministerial request will reference the NPAS CLF guidance document as evidence that FPT governments have worked with the broadcast community to produce documented guidance regarding the "common look and feel" of emergency public alerts.

CONCLUSIONS.

9. It is concluded that the NPAS CLF guidance document provides key information and guidance for alerting authorities, last mile distributors and application developers to support the distribution of public alerts using a standard look and feel. This guidance document will help to ensure that public alerts are provided in a consistent form to Canadians.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

10. It is recommended that the National Public Alerting System Common Look and Feel Guidance document be maintained and updated as further advancements are made in the NPAS. With the evolution to wireless public alerting, this will result in the need for additional common look and feel guidance for alert issuers and last mile distributors.

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⁷ PRESS RELEASE - FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL-TERRITORIAL MINISTERS MEET TO DISCUSS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT <http://www.scics.gc.ca/english/conferences.asp?a=viewdocument&id=2030>

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