



25 August 2025



Reference: OIA-2025/26-0061

Dear

Official Information Act request relating to the national emergency alert decision-making process

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 31 July 2025. You requested:

“Decision-Making Process:

1. Which team(s) or individual(s) within NEMA are responsible for deciding when a national emergency alert is issued?

*2. What criteria or process is followed to determine whether a national alert should be sent?
Content Determination:*

3. How is the content of the alert determined, and who signs off on it before it is distributed nationally?

Duplicate Alerts:

4. Under what circumstances are multiple or duplicate alerts sent to the same recipients?

5. Is there a protocol in place to prevent unintended duplication?”

For clarity, I have numbered the parts of your request.

I am withholding the names and positions of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) staff members who are responsible for deciding when a national emergency alert is issued under section 9(2)(g)(ii) of the Act, to protect them from improper pressure or harassment. I have considered the public interest in the release of this information and determined no such interest exists that would outweigh the reasons for withholding this information.

The Emergency Mobile Alert (EMA) system is governed by strict protocol on its use. The [Emergency Mobile Alert Protocol for User Agencies](#) document covers the criteria for sending Emergency Mobile Alerts to New Zealanders. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will only send alerts when there is a severe, urgent and likely threat to life, health or property. Dangerous tsunami activity generated by the Kamchatka earthquake affecting New Zealand’s coastline clearly met these criteria, and the decision to use it was informed by scientific advice and consultation with Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups.

The Emergency Mobile Alert system, and the noise it generates, is based on a global standard, and is also used in other countries. In nearly eight years of use in New Zealand, which has seen tens of millions of instances of alerts being received by people, NEMA is not aware of any confirmed severe health event or accident that has been directly attributed to the use of Emergency Mobile Alerts. Conversely, every time the system is used, it potentially prevents significant impacts to life, health or property.

In respect of emergency management, NEMA has a statutory responsibility to alert the public to tsunami risk. Every decision to alert the public is based on best advice available including scientific evidence, international best practice, the observable conditions, and the life safety risks.

When NEMA received notification that a powerful earthquake had occurred and generated tsunami waves that were travelling across the Pacific, it was a straightforward decision to alert people to help them stay safe.

Based on advice from Earth Sciences NZ that tsunami activity would arrive at our shores around midnight on Wednesday evening (30 July), NEMA issued a National Advisory and sent an Emergency Mobile Alert. As always, we carefully selected who should receive it - in this case, the alert was only sent to phones connected to a mobile tower near the coastline. The first alert was sent at 4.13pm as it was critical to issue it before nightfall, because many people live on boats, or plan ahead for early fishing trips or a dawn surf.

Overnight, we received confirmation that tsunami activity was impacting New Zealand's coastline and would continue to do so well into Thursday (31 July). We weighed up the risks and concluded that we needed to inform the public that the threat was present and ongoing. We sent the alert at 6.30am to ensure we did not wake large numbers of people up in the middle of the night, while informing those planning morning activities in beach or marine areas while dangerous tsunami activity was happening.

Regarding the frequency of the alerts, we acknowledge that some people's phones sounded multiple alerts in the middle of the night, even though NEMA had only issued two alerts. NEMA never issues duplicate alerts – any subsequent alerts need to have new information or advice, as was the case here. Further information on the duplication of alerts can be found on the following website: [NEMA identifies what caused emergency alert issues during Kamchatka tsunami event » National Emergency Management Agency](#)

Information on the M8.8 Kamchatka Russia earthquake and tsunami prepared by GeoNet is available on the following website:
<https://www.geonet.org.nz/news/4O1zMlf5rXqq8mFCJOfcEq>

More information on civil defence emergency management alerts and warnings are available on the following website:
<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/get-ready/civil-defence-emergency-management-alerts-and-warnings>

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Holland
**Chief Advisor to the Chief Executive
National Emergency Management Agency**