



25 August 2025



Reference: OIA-2025/26-0080

Dear

Official Information Act request relating to Emergency Mobile Alerts

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

- “1. In the decision-making process relating to the issuing of emergency alerts, what consideration / weighting is given to the fact that the alerts themselves may cause harm (eg loud alerts causing distress, heart attacks, motor vehicle crashes)?*
- 2. What analysis / evidence do you have to inform the approach detail in answer to question 1? Please provide full detail.*
- 3. Detail of the approach to targeting alerts to those for whom the alert is relevant (eg targeting those on the coast / in the sea for tsunami alerts). This should include detail of criteria of whether minimum applicability thresholds have to be reached before an alert can be made (eg an alert can only be issued if it is expected to be applicable to more than 50% of recipients before it issued), to avoid edge cases being used to justify mass disruption.”*

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.

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/4O1zMI5rXgg8mFCJOfcEg>

More information on civil defence emergency management alerts and warnings are available on the following website:

[Civil Defence Emergency Management Alerts and Warnings » National Emergency Management Agency](#)

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**