



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

John L. Mica
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Nick J. Rahall, III
Ranking Member

November 29, 2011

James W. Coon II, Chief of Staff

James H. Zoia, Democrat Chief of Staff

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

As you know, emergency communications are critical in crisis management and for protecting the public in situations of war, terrorist attack, or natural disaster and currently the federal government is undertaking the large and complicated task of implementing the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS). In September 2009, GAO's Physical Infrastructure group reported that the Emergency Alert System (EAS), the principal means for public alerting and the only operational aspect of IPAWS, had remained largely unchanged since your previous review in 2007. Additionally, you noted that a lack of training and national-level testing raised questions about whether the relay system would actually work during a national-level emergency. Based on your recommendations, in November 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), together with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the nation's broadcasters, cable companies and satellite companies, conducted the first-ever nationwide test of EAS. While this Committee realizes the first-ever nationwide test is an important step, the test revealed that significant portions of the system did not work as intended and might not be effective to warn Americans in the event of a national-level emergency. After the test, discrepancies were reported across the country with some television and radio stations not airing the test alert at all due to equipment failures, training inadequacies, and other problems.

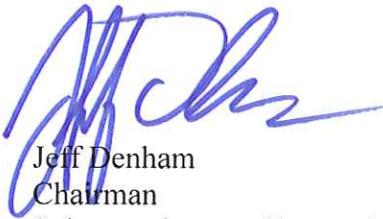
Since it is critically important for the nation to have efficient and effective alert and warning capabilities, we would like GAO to continue to review efforts to modernize EAS and implement IPAWS. We are requesting that GAO provide the Committee a thorough understanding of why and where the broadcast community was unable to effectively run the EAS test, and efforts to fix this problem. Additionally, building on your previous work, we would like you to examine (1) alert capabilities and technologies that are available or under development and how they could be used to help satisfy the goals of Executive Order 13407, (2) the extent to which states and localities are continuing to develop their own alerting systems and how difficult

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it will be to integrate these systems with IPAWS, and (3) how IPAWS intends to provide alert and warnings that can reach people with disabilities and non-English speakers.

Please coordinate your work with Dan Mathews or Johanna Hardy of the majority staff at 202-225-3014 or Janet Erickson of the minority staff at 202-225-9961.

Sincerely,



Jeff Denham
Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic Development,
Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Development,
Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management