

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="198 408 1870 558">• 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.<li data-bbox="198 586 1870 843">• 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.<li data-bbox="198 872 1769 915">• The day shift warning officers receive this recorded message on speakerphone.<li data-bbox="198 943 1831 1086">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="198 1108 1846 1200">• 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.<li data-bbox="198 1229 1856 1372">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Day shift warning officer receives false WEA on mobile device
0809	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA notifies Hawaii Governor of false alert
0810	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA to U.S. Pacific Command and Honolulu PD: no missile launch
0812	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA issues a cancellation, ceasing retransmission over EAS, WEA
0813	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA begins outreach, but its phone lines become congested
0820	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA posts on Facebook, Twitter – “NO missile threat to Hawaii”
0824	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hawaii Governor retweets notice that there is no missile threat
0827	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA determines that an EAS, WEA Civil Emergency Message (CEM) is the best vehicle for correction
0830	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FEMA confirms HI-EMA’s view on CEM; Hawaii Governor posts correction on Facebook
0831	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HI-EMA supervisor logs into alert system, begins to create false alert correction
0845	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.