

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRMAN TOM WHEELER**

Re: *Wireless Emergency Alerts*, PS Docket No. 15-91; *Amendments to Part 11 of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System*, PS Docket No. 15-94

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Without *continual* growth and improvement, such words as improvement, achievement and success have no meaning." No doubt, Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are a proven success at improving public safety. But Franklin's wisdom and the march of technological progress compel the Commission to continually reevaluate these alerts – and all our rules – to ask if we can do better. With today's Order, we are meeting this mandate and in the process, improving public safety.

Since its launch in 2012, Wireless Emergency Alerts have notified Americans via their cell phones about severe weather, missing children, and other emergencies. These notifications have, quite simply, saved lives.

Just take the case of WEA-enabled AMBER alerts. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that over 30 children have been saved as a result of AMBER Alerts to cell phones. This past May, in Las Vegas, for instance, WEA was instrumental in the safe return of a kidnapped 22-month toddler; the WEA alert itself alarmed the abductors who fled from their hideout without the child, who was returned to her home.

Perhaps the most high-profile use of the Wireless Emergency Alert system came days after today's item was circulated, when a bomb was set off in the New York City neighborhood of Chelsea. This example is particularly relevant to today's item because it highlights both the value and limitations of the current system.

Much has been made of the fact that the alert notifying the public of the identity of the Chelsea bombing suspect lacked a picture of the at-large suspect – a shortcoming addressed by today's Order. But it's important to note that when a secondary device was discovered after the initial bombing, the WEA system was used to alert people to "shelter in place." The system works - and now it will work better.

With these new rules, we are taking action to make this life-saving service even more useful by incorporating lessons learned from the first four years of service and by leveraging technological advances.

Acting on recommendations from public safety officials, the new Wireless Emergency Alerts will carry more information and will better targeted geographically. For example, emergency managers will be able to send more informative messages, because the maximum alert length will be expanded from 90 characters to 360.

I'm particularly pleased that we were able to answer Senator Schumer's call to expedite enhancements to the system, such as ensuring all alerts will soon be able to include embedded links, so that you will be able click to see a photo of the missing child, a suspected terrorist, a map, or to call authorities. I'd like to thank the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, in particular, Bob Lowery, Vice President of Missing Children Division, John Bischoff, Executive Director of Missing Children Division, Bob Hoever, retired NCMEC Director of AMBER Alert program, and Preston Findlay, Legal Counsel, who worked closely and productively with the Public Safety Bureau staff to make sure these amended rules can become an ever-more effective way of making sure children are found and returned home safely.

Today's decision will help local public safety officials better meet the needs of specific communities. It will enable, for instance, local officials to send Spanish-language alerts, and seeks comment on transmitting alerts in additional languages as well as with multimedia content.

Today's rules also take into consideration the so-called "car alarm" or "alert syndrome," where the alert goes out to too many people who are physically far away from the unfolding situation. The rules will lessen that problem by requiring participating wireless providers to deliver alerts to more specific geographic areas, including by relying on the capabilities of a consumer's wireless device to target messages, and by allowing carriers to provide their subscribers with more flexibility in how alerts are presented.

The amended rules are informed by stakeholder input and experience – wireless providers, the public safety community, representatives of the consumers and individuals with access and functional needs, child protection advocates, and our Federal partners.

How important is today's item? NYPD Commissioner James P. O'Neill said it best in the closing line of his letter supporting today's rules, "Lives are truly on the line." That's as important as it gets, and that's why I'm pleased the Commission is moving to improve Wireless Emergency Alerts.

Thank you to the Public Safety Bureau for your work on this item.