



National guidelines for the use of SEWS



Australian Government



Standard
Emergency
Warning
Signal
stop & listen



Standard Emergency Warning Signal

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SEWS is a distinctive audio signal that has been adopted to alert the community to the broadcast of an **urgent safety message** relating to a major **emergency/disaster**. It is intended for use as an alert signal to be played on public media (such as radio, television, public address systems, mobile sirens), to draw listeners' attention to a following emergency warning. It is meant to attract listeners' attention to the fact that they should take notice of the emergency message.

Introduction

The broadcast of practical information to the public in an emergency will enable the community to take appropriate actions to protect life and property. The Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) will alert the public to information about actions they can take to reduce potential loss of life and property.

It is vital that the effectiveness of the SEWS is preserved by limiting its use to significant events only. The signal is only to be used in emerging situations of extreme danger, when there is a need to warn the public that they need to take some urgent and immediate action in order to reduce the potential for loss to life or property from emergency events. Such events will be restricted to:

- **severe thunderstorm**
- **wind gust**
- **severe flooding leading to residential inundation**
- **intense rainfall leading to flash flooding and/or landslides**
- **cyclone**
- **tsunami**
- **large hail**
- **tornado**
- **storm tide**
- **hazardous materials emergency**
- **biological hazard/major pollution, hazardous material or biohazard emergency**
- **earthquake aftershock**
- **dam failure/dam burst**
- **major bushfire/major urban and rural fire**
- **public safety emergency**

Use of the signal

The signal will only be used:

- a. to alert listeners/viewers of radio/television, or where appropriate by other means, that an official announcement is about to be made concerning an actual or potential major emergency/disaster likely to affect them
- b. when the public need to be informed to take, or be prepared to take, specific action in order to protect life, property or the environment during an emergency
- c. SEWS is only to be used when its use has been authorised by an initiating authority

The following four factors should be present:

1. potential for loss of life and/or a major threat to a significant number of properties or the large-scale environment
2. impact is expected within 12 hours - or is occurring at the time
3. a significant number of people need to be warned
4. one or more phenomena are classified as “destructive”



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Instruction to use SEWS

The following people are authorised to instruct the use SEWS:

- the State or Territory Regional Director of the Bureau of Meteorology for weather and flood related events
- initiating authority/authorities nominated by each State/Territory for non-weather related events in that State/Territory

Procedure for the use of SEWS

Requests to the media to broadcast SEWS will only come from the following organisations:

- the Australian Bureau of Meteorology
- organisations nominated by each State/Territory for non-weather related events in that State/Territory

The authority initiating SEWS will advise the relevant media outlets by whatever means is deemed appropriate and will immediately confirm all details in an agreed medium (e.g. fax, telephone, email).

The request for broadcast of an emergency announcement using SEWS will contain details of the text of the message, information as to when broadcasts are to commence and how frequently they should be repeated as well as the localities in which they should be broadcast.

Requests for a SEWS broadcast will contain the name and appointment of the appropriate authorising officer and will also contain relevant telephone contact numbers so that confirmation of information can be undertaken by the broadcaster.

Message format

Messages should open with the following statement:

EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT

This is an official emergency announcement for... (insert appropriate area)... issued by... (insert appropriate authority)... concerning... (insert type of emergency)...

SEWS messages should contain the following details:

- what has happened
- what has been done to date
- where it happened
- what is proposed to be done
- when it happened
- any public safety instructions/messages/directions

Messages should close with the following statement:

This emergency announcement was issued by... (insert appropriate authority)... Stay tuned to this station for further information.

Media instructions

On receipt of a written request to issue a warning, the media are expected to:

- confirm the message is not a hoax by calling the number given (if in doubt)
- begin the broadcast by playing the Standard Emergency Warning Signal for 15 seconds
- broadcast the Emergency Announcement **verbatim**

The broadcast of the SEWS, followed by the Emergency Announcement, is to be repeated twice at five minute intervals, unless requested otherwise by the Authorising Officer. Cancellation of the Request is to be confirmed by the Issuing Authority.

Format of request to the media to use SEWS

All requests to the media will contain the Name, Appointment and Telephone Number of the Authorising Officer and the Formal Warning Message. Use of this proforma is mandatory.

REQUEST TO BROADCAST AN EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT USING THE STANDARD EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNAL

This is a formal request to broadcast the following emergency announcement **preceded by Standard Emergency Warning Signal**.

Please broadcast this message **verbatim** every _____ minutes for the next _____ hour(s)

This use of the SEWS is authorised by _____ (Name)
_____ (Appointment)

This message may be confirmed by telephoning _____ (Telephone No.)

EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT

This is an official announcement for _____ (Area)

Issued by _____ (Appointment/Agency)

Concerning _____ (Emergency Description)

Message Text: Optional details

_____ (What has happened, Where, When)

_____ (What has been done to date)

_____ (What actions are proposed)

PUBLIC SAFETY MESSAGES

(This section to include any actions the public should take to protect life and property)

THIS EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT WAS ISSUED BY

_____ (Appointment/Agency)

Time: _____

Date: _____

STAY TUNED TO THIS STATION FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Background on the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)

SEWS is a distinctive wailing siren sound. It is different from currently used emergency sirens, such as the building evacuation siren, emergency services siren, child abduction alert and shark warning siren. The broadcast of practical information to the public in an emergency will enable the community to take appropriate actions to protect life and property. SEWS will alert the public to information about actions they can take to reduce potential loss of life and property.

The Australian Government and the States and Territories identified the need for a national emergency warning signal in 1983. In May 1995 Emergency Management Australia (EMA), the Bureau of Meteorology and the States and Territories agreed that the distinctive siren used in the event of land falling tropical cyclones should be adopted as the all-hazard standard warning signal.

On 21 May 1995, the National Emergency Management Committee formerly endorsed the use of the signal as the Standard Emergency Warning Signal for Australia. Following this endorsement, in 1997 a public education campaign was launched in the States and Territories, supported by the Australian Government. This campaign focused on its application as an all-hazard warning signal.

In September 2004, the then Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC) supported a recommendation from the Bureau of Meteorology that a set of clear, prescriptive and nationally consistent guidelines for the use and application of SEWS should be developed. These guidelines were subsequently developed and provide direction and support to the State and Territory Emergency Management Authorities. The States and Territories now implement these guidelines as appropriate to their jurisdiction.

Further information on SEWS can be found at:
Emergency Management in Australia.

www.ema.gov.au