

Carl Huie

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Carl,

Attached is the talk I delivered in May to the Annual Meeting of the Partnership for Public Warning on our national strategy for improving public warning. The words sent to you by Mark Foss came from this talk. I do believe that SafetyCast is an innovative new solution that has great potential.
Peter

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The National Strategy for Integrated Public Warning Policy and Capability

A Talk to the Annual Meeting of the Partnership for Public Warning

Dr. Peter L. Ward

On behalf of PPW, I delight in welcoming each and every person here today. This is a seminal event in the history of public warning and you are part of it. Even more important, you are part of the future of public warning in America.

Many of us assembled here today share a vision. It is a hopeful vision.

We see a time, not all that far in the future, when every man, woman, and child in America will be empowered to protect themselves. We see a time when our citizens at risk will receive timely information to aid them in making critical decisions about how to save their own lives and how to reduce their own losses. And this will work for natural disasters, for acts of terrorism, and for technological accidents. The informed actions of American citizens will make themselves safer. Their informed actions will make our communities safer. Their informed actions will make our nation stronger.

This is an achievable vision. We already have the technology. We already have people working hard towards this vision. Many are sitting right here in this room today. We have had a lot of success. We have installed some systems that work quite well. But we also recognize that we have to do a lot better.

Today we simply cannot warn enough of the people directly at risk. Even worse, we often warn a lot of people not directly at risk, desensitizing them to future warnings.

A primary effort of the Partnership for Public Warning over the past year has been to look at public warning from a national, high-level point of view. Our goal has been to identify the critical issues and promising approaches toward solutions. We developed a process. We requested information widely. We carefully selected a drafting committee representative of all the stakeholders of public warning and they worked intently together for 5 days. We circulated a draft widely for comment.

The primary product of all this work by so many people is The National Strategy for Integrated Public Warning Policy and Capability before us today. This document spells out for the first time ever, the values, the principles, the elements, the issues and the challenges that we face. It gives a plan for action. It says somebody has to be in charge and we all have to work together to make this vision a reality.

What are the challenges that we face?

The biggest challenge is inadequate market penetration. We need to notify anyone at direct risk no matter where they are, no matter what they are doing, no matter what time of the day or night. Right now, using every tool in our toolbox, we can only warn directly a few percent in the

middle of the night. And even during the day, under the best of circumstances, when time is of the essence, we can only reach directly a minority of those at risk.

The normal way for government to approach this problem would be to spend billions of dollars to give every American a warning receiver. Then with the push of a button, every American, rich or poor, would get the information they need. But this receiver might only be needed by its owner once a year or once every few years. Will the batteries be dead? Will the person still be carrying it around or will it simply be on the shelf in the garage, next to the exercycle?

We have to think outside of the box. We cannot afford to become victims of limited perspective. We have to make warning receivers an integral part of our daily lives, but a part that we do not need to keep mindful of at all times.

How do we make warnings an integral part of our daily lives? We build the receivers into every piece of electronics we own. Any piece of electronics can monitor a warning signal 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Any piece of electronics can decide when to notify its owner and do so in a way most appropriate to that owner, no matter what language they speak, no matter what is their physical condition, no matter how well they are prepared.

But we have also learned in public warning that there is no single simple answer. While warning receivers built into all types of electronics will meet the needs of many, there will also be the need for special devices built to receive warnings and to take action. These special devices could come in many forms from sirens and public address systems, to a smoke detector-like device hanging on your wall or a caller-id-like box plugged into your telephone. There are many, many possibilities.

No matter what the device, we have to respect privacy. The owners of the devices need control of the warning functionality. They need to control what private information is needed to contact them or to identify them as being at direct risk. Warning is intrusive but it needs to respect our fundamental American values.

Many opportunities already exist. There are more than 145 million Americans today carrying cellular telephones that are potential warning devices – not just by a voice call, but by Short Message Services that are far more efficient use of the infrastructure. On that fateful day of September 11, 2001, the cellular networks became overloaded rapidly in both New York and Washington, but the Short Message Services functioned flawlessly.

We also know that cellular broadcast is feasible. This would put minimum stress on the infrastructure and would target only the people close to a specific cellular telephone tower. When a tornado is winding through communities, wreaking disaster, we could broadcast from specific cellular towers, reaching only those at greatest risk. We do not even need to know their names. If their cell phones are turned on, they will get the message. And if the cell phone of the future has the right technology built in that already exists, it could get the message and turn itself on.

Radio spectrum capacity for warnings already exists and new opportunities abound. For example, public television will be the first network in the country to take full advantage of the new digital television technology. They reach 99% of the US population. Right here, today, in this room, there are digital signals in the air around us containing emergency information. The

local PBS television station is multiplexing potentially life saving information into their digital television programming that an appropriate receiver can use to warn you. And this receiver does not need to be a television. It could be any electronic device. These signals could be available throughout America by using an infrastructure built to educate and entertain, but one that could also be used to warn at no additional cost to taxpayers. And this is just one example. There are numerous existing infrastructures built and maintained for reasons other than warning that could be used to deliver warnings to people under widely varying circumstances.

Next month, television sets will be in the stores that listen to NOAA Weather Radio and interrupt programming or turn themselves on and even wake you up in the middle of the night when a warning applies to your county. You just push a button on your remote control and the warning that was broadcast earlier is repeated. You can push another button to tune into your favorite news channel for additional information.

The Internet is another technology that holds great promise. It is revolutionizing our lives, the way we do business, and the way we have fun. Internet has made the whole world our library where anybody can be a publisher. People are interacting more efficiently. Internet can be used to deliver warnings. It can be used to make detailed information instantly available in times of crisis or when you want to prepare. But Internet can also provide a way to collect official warnings together and send them to the inputs of all the different delivery systems available. Internet protocol has become the lingua franca for electronics. Your cell phones use Internet Protocol and will soon display pictures, maps, and tables of information – anything you can transmit in Internet protocol.

But we are already moving beyond Internet in the traditional computer workstation sense. Wireless gadgets extend Internet to our mobile lifestyles. Several companies are making wristwatches that deliver selected information based on Internet to your wrist. Many other possibilities are being created and implemented to integrate the wealth of Internet into our lives.

One problem with Internet is finding what you want. There are exciting new capabilities being created daily to address this challenge. For example, if you go to www.earth911.org on the Internet today, and if you type in your zip code, you will immediately find everything you need to know about the environment in your neighborhood. You will discover many places within a few miles of your home to recycle your used motor oil. While you have driven past these businesses regularly, you never thought of them for oil recycling. Earth911 is a paradigm where 10,000 communities across the country voluntarily input their local information into systems operated at no cost to themselves or any government and thereby making their information more easily available to their own citizens in ways they could never afford to establish themselves. This information is available any where in the world on Internet and in English or Spanish through a 1-800 hotline.

Why can't we do the same for warnings? Why can't we empower 10,000 communities to provide their warnings easily and cheaply into a system that will not only display them with more detailed information on a website and communicate them through toll-free numbers, but more importantly will also deliver them to the inputs of the endless variety of warning dissemination systems? A Warning911 will have to be secure and robust. The details of a Warning911 will be very different from an Earth911. We need to begin the process of design and implementation.

But the vision of a Warning911 is the result of our National Strategy. The vision is at hand, right now. The vision is simply to put all official warning information into a single secure stream of information that can be sent to the inputs of all systems in the world that can deliver the individual warnings to people directly at risk. The need for such a stream using a standard all-hazard terminology, using a standard protocol, fostering interoperability is the single primary recommendation of our National Strategy.

As we think outside the box, it is useful to look at our current national warning system, the Emergency Alert System because this is a classic example of a conflict between our dreams and basic realities. We must find ways to harmonize.

EAS depends on the goodwill of our nation's broadcasters to broadcast warnings. They operate under an unfunded Federal government mandate to allow the President to usurp their transmitters at any moment to speak to the nation. But they volunteer to broadcast any other warning message. Unfunded Federal mandates do not get the same level of energy and commitment that the marketplace spawns. Broadcasters are caught between their strong desire for public good and the cold hard reality that their existence depends on ratings and market share. Every time a show or an advertisement is interrupted by an emergency message, there are real, tangible costs. Furthermore most who listen to a large radio station will not even be at risk for the specific event. The current paradigm simply does not make much sense.

We now have a lot of well-meaning people, volunteering large amounts of time and at odds with each other because their dreams and realities are like oil and water. We need to find solid, win-win approaches for all involved.

One of the fondest dreams of the Partnership for Public Warning, is that by our activities, we can unleash unbridled creativity to solve a difficult problem. Last night I has delighted to find out that this is already working. There is a new company here today who has consciously built on all the words we have written and chosen this conference as the first public announcement of a new product that offers an amazing solution to very localized alert and warning. I was left with two thoughts. The first was "WOW". The second was "How in the world did you do that?"

So where do we go from here?

First we must agree to work together. The Partnership for Public Warning has charted new ground here. In 17 months we have brought many leaders together across the broad spectrum of stakeholders of public warning. We have raised awareness of public warning problems and put them on the national agenda. We have raised the hopes of everyone in this room and many outside of this room that a significant national problem might finally be resolvable.

Second we must find money. We have had all this success living on fumes. We are at the River Rubicon and we need to cross. We need to commit. More specifically, the Federal government needs to commit. We do not need much money to pick up speed during the rest of this year. We need to see a commitment to build upon the solid foundation we have laid out in our National Strategy and related documents. We need to move forward in a sound manner that makes business and political sense.

Third we need a standard, all-hazard terminology. A warning says there is a risk and this is what you should do about it. It does not matter whether the risk is terrorism, tornadoes, or technological accidents. The need to communicate basic information is the same. We need a common all-hazard terminology.

Fourth we need standard protocols. This is the age of interoperability. Primarily for economic reasons, we have largely moved as a nation to embrace interoperability as the key to future success. Standard protocols permit systems to be interoperable. The Common Alerting Protocol is an excellent first step. CAP comes out of years of experience and is a catalyst for ideas that is already in development and under test. CAP is the cornerstone of the Partnerships efforts for standard protocol.

Fifth we need to connect the warners with the deliverers. We must find ways to connect people with official warnings to issue with industries whose systems will deliver those warnings through devices that are integral to our daily lives. What does industry need? They need a place to plug in to get all official warnings so that industry does not carry any liability for the content of the message. Then industry needs to see a market that justifies their investment. National standards assure a national market. Industry also needs clear and unambiguous signals from the Federal government that warning is important and that what the stakeholders decide on will be considered carefully for national policy. When industry sees these things, they will unleash all kinds of energy and creativity. This is the Warning911 concept.

Sixth we must focus warnings on only the people at risk. This could be a specific geographic region, or maybe several city blocks, or possibly even a specific building. GPS and other such technologies are becoming available throughout our society. Geographic focusing of warnings is quite feasible if we focus on the problem. There is also a value in focusing warnings on affinity groups of people such as volunteer firefighters in a specific region. This also is easily achievable if we work together.

Let's take stock of where we are. We have a lot to be proud of and thankful for. In 1997 and 1998, a forward looking group of government specialists met monthly at the White House Conference Center to lay a foundation for improving disaster warning. Many of those people are in this room today and I had the privilege of chairing that group. We came to the fundamental realization that only a public/private partnership of representatives of all the stakeholders of warning had a realistic chance for successfully improving disaster warning.

Then an energetic engineer with boundless enthusiasm came quite independently to a similar conclusion with people he met through FEMA Technology Conferences. He talked his employer into some support and before September 11, 2001, called a conference to meet here in McLean on November 29th to seek interest in forming a partnership. More than 120 people got together in small-facilitated groups and brainstormed on warning issues. Many of you were there. A visionary leader from the far north rallied those present to a unanimous decision to form such a partnership.

Then the hard work began. Those who heard of this effort and shared the vision met monthly and nurtured a gleam in their collective eye into a new organization that in 17 short months became nationally recognized as the best hope for improved public warning in the country.

The road was not easy. We struggled to define and redefine common principles that would bring us together. We have worked through the growing pains expected in any new endeavor. And out of this comes a clear vision of what we are about; it can all be summed up in one word – discussion. When discussion flourishes, the partnership flourishes. When discussion is inhibited, progress is inhibited. As we move forward, we must keep mindful of the fact that partnership enables discussion and discussion enables partnership.

There is another basic law of human interaction: the more people involved, the longer it takes to make decisions. We come together in partnership to benefit from the breadth of experience and viewpoint. This breadth will slow progress. We have already unleashed new hope for public warning in this country and the doers are not waiting for us. A pilot effort to implement what we talk of is already well underway in Washington State focused on AMBER, which is only one of the many faces of public warning. But AMBER has national attention right now, money to move forward, and a political need to show success soon. On May 2, Rose Parkes, who spoke to you this morning, sent a letter to Washington State expressing how closely the goals of this Washington State project are aligned with FEMA's interests and seeking ways to Partner. Many more big partners are already involved.

There is major motion in the State of Arizona involving emergency personnel and broadcasters to develop Warning911 as a national prototype. Many other states are interested. The nation is moving toward solution.

Tomorrow we meet at 9 am to discuss specific steps for the future. I hope you will all be there. This is a partnership and we need your help. We need to get on with the discussion and we need to get on with it now.

For me, the greatest enjoyment of these past 17 months is the friendships I have started to make with each of you and with so many people at so many levels of government, industry, and non-profit organizations. There are a lot of stakeholders of public warning and they are all personally concerned and personally committed. They are all the kind of personally invigorating people that it is fun to be around.

Well my friends, we have come a long way in a short time. We are feeling more like a team every minute. We are staring triumph in the face. The time has come to implement our vision. The time has come to empower each and every American with timely information. We now know what needs to be done. Our National Strategy lays out the principles. Through partnership, Federal commitment, a little bit of money, and a lot of hard work, we can make a huge difference for America. ... And for the world.

Thank you.