
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION**Senator Bill Dodd****Chair****2021 - 2022 Regular**

Bill No:	AB 2477	Hearing Date:	6/28/2022
Author:	Rodriguez		
Version:	5/19/2022 Amended		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Brian Duke		

SUBJECT: Emergency alert and warning service providers: minimum operating standards

DIGEST: This bill requires the California Office of Emergency Services (OES), on or before July 1, 2024, by regulation, to adopt minimum operating standards for private sector companies that provide alert and warning services to local entities.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) The California Emergency Services Act (ESA) establishes OES within the office of the Governor and makes OES responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services, as specified.
- 2) Requires OES, on or before July 1, 2022, in consultation with specified entities, to develop voluntary guidelines for alerting and warning the public of an emergency, and requires OES to provide cities and counties with a copy of the guidelines, as specified.
- 3) Requires OES, within six months of making the statewide guidelines available and at least annually thereafter and through its California Specialized Training Institute, to develop an alert and warning training, as specified.

This bill requires OES, on or before July 1, 2024, by regulation, to adopt minimum operating standards for private sector companies that provide alert and warning services to local entities.

Background

Purpose of the Bill. According to the author's office, "state and local governmental entities rely on private sector contractors to issue emergency alerts and warnings throughout California. Local emergency managers rely upon these vendors to routinely warn the public of fires, floods, extreme temperatures, or areas to avoid due to police activity or other hazardous activities. Local alert and warning systems are also critically important during major disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, major fires and pandemics. Alerts can convey vital information about evacuation routes and shelter locations. Given the importance of emergency alert and warning programs to our communities, Cal OES should develop minimum operating standards for private sector vendors to ensure these platforms are resilient to all types of disasters."

California State Warning Center. The California State Warning Center (SWC), within OES, is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to identify potential and emerging threats across the state, give alert notification of threats to all levels of government, and provide critical situational awareness during an emergency or disaster. SWC staff make over one million notifications annually due to weather-related warnings, fires, power outages, seismic incidents and other potentially significant incidents that may have emergency management impacts.

Other Alert Systems. The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System is the national system providing authenticated emergency and life-saving information to the public through mobile phones via Wireless Emergency Alerts and through radio and television via the Emergency Alert System.

In recent years, California has experienced severe problems warning citizens in times of disaster and emergency, resulting in the tragic loss of lives. After the 2017 and 2018 fire seasons, it became clear that not all jurisdictions were prepared to issue emergency alerts. SB 833 (McGuire, Chapter 617, Statutes of 2018) required OES to develop voluntary best practices for local governments to use when sending public alerts, with local governments bearing the ultimate responsibility to issue warnings. Each county has its own alerting program through which residents can sign up to receive alerts. Many cities also have their own unique alerting programs, provided through different vendors and systems.

This bill requires OES to develop regulations to set minimum operating standards for these private alert and warning services providers. Presumably, OES would consult with local stakeholders regarding regulations impacting these local government warning services, but such collaboration is not specified in this bill.

Prior/Related Legislation

AB 1648 (Maienschein, 2022) requires any city or county, to require, as a condition for obtaining a kennel license or permit, that the kennel owner create and submit to the city or county an animal natural disaster evacuation plan, as specified. (Pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee)

AB 2645 (Rodriguez, 2022) requires counties to ensure community resilience centers are able to serve as community-wide assets during disasters – including extreme heat events – and integrate these centers into their local emergency plans, as specified. (Pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee)

SB 833 (McGuire, Chapter 617, Statutes of 2018) requires OES to work with specified stakeholders to develop guidelines around emergency alerts and requires additional training for local emergency office personnel.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT:

California Fire Chiefs Association
City of Malibu
Disability Rights California
Fire Districts Association of California
Genasys Corporation

OPPOSITION:

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of the bill, Disability Rights California argues that, “[d]isabled people have struggled over the years to get the proper information in order to evacuate safely from wildfires in California. The Dixie fire showed how devastating wildfires can be on entire towns. Northern California, especially, is home to a large population of disabled people. Disability organizations in California continue to advocate so that their voices are heard, particularly on the issue of wildfire safety and emergency response. The more notifications to reach people the better. AB 2477 is helpful to ensure notification of emergencies reach as many as possible when there are interruptions to private company’s alerts. Proper notifications can come at a time when services or evacuations might be necessary for disabled people who are in emergency scenarios.”