



# Reaching People with Disabilities: Wireless Emergency Alerting and Accessibility

Georgia Emergency Preparedness Coalition for Individuals with  
Disabilities and Older Adults

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FEMA







## Why?

- Emergency information is critical
- FCC requires disability access to warn the public
- 91% of American adults own a cell phone (Pew Research)
- 95% of people with disabilities use wireless products (our survey)
- Many U.S. federal and state websites are inaccessible
- Information is posted online on websites or social media platforms



## Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)



- Sent to your cell phone
- Appear as child abduction, weather emergencies, or presidential alerts
- No need to subscribe
- The messages are free
- 90 character limit
- Does not include internet links

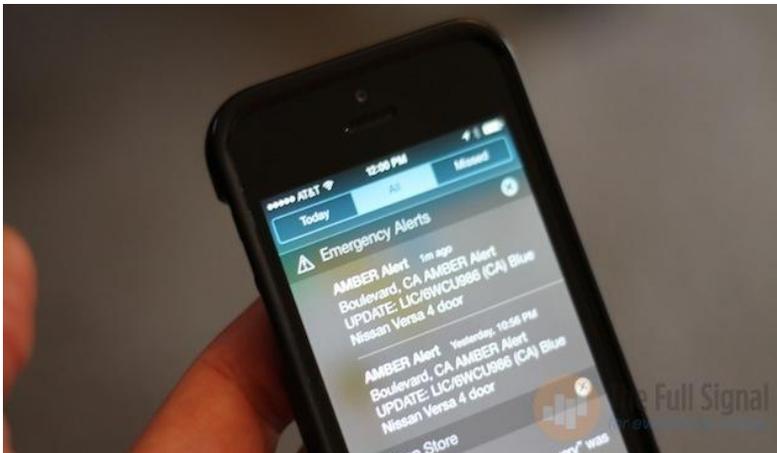
# Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), Part 2

## AMBER Alert

Acworth, GA AMBER Alert:  
LIC/ (GA) White  
Range Rover

## Severe Alert

Flash Flood Warning this  
area til 3:15 AM EDT. Avoid  
flood areas. Check local  
media. -NWS



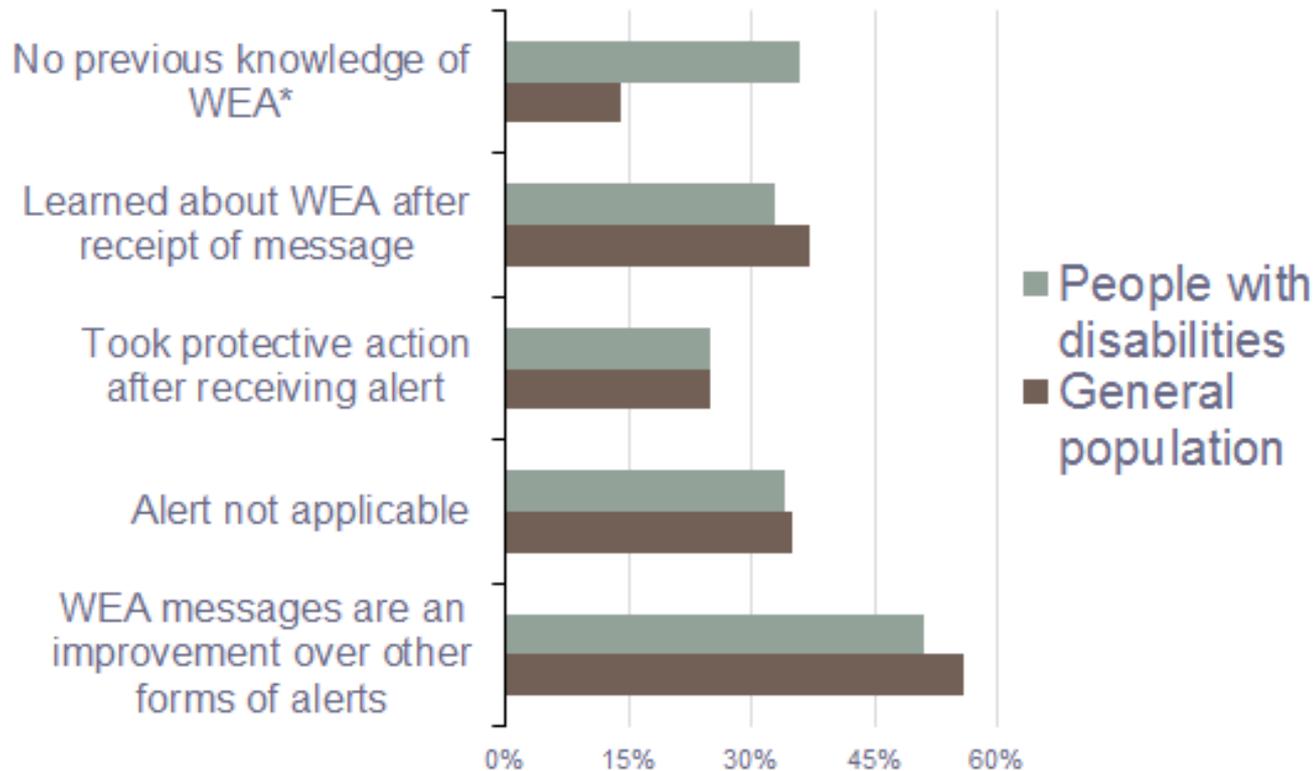
# 2014 Survey

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- The purpose of the survey is to assess awareness, use, and subsequent protective action after receipt of a WEA message.
- Over 1800 respondents
- 18% persons with disability
  - 24% caregiver for person with disability

| Participant Profile    |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| <b>Total</b>           | 1,830 |
| <b>With Disability</b> | 321   |
| <b>Caregivers</b>      | 202   |
| <b>Age Range</b>       | 18-92 |
| <b>Average Age</b>     | 50    |

# WEA Survey Highlights



\*p-value less than .05

## Additional Features (all respondents)

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| Feature                    | N    | Percent |
|----------------------------|------|---------|
| Icons, graphics, and maps  | 1150 | 73%     |
| Internet Link              | 1056 | 67%     |
| Live Video/Audio Streaming | 651  | 41%     |
| ASL                        | 178  | 11%     |
| Other                      | 151  | 9%      |

# Top 4 sources for alerts

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## GENERAL POPULATION

1. Email – 30%
2. **Subscription-based Emergency Text – 26%**
3. **Television 25%**
4. **NOAA Weather Radio – 24%**

24% did not receive alert from another source

## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

1. Email – 14%
2. **Television – 13%**
3. **Social Media – 11%**
4. **Subscription-based Emergency Alert – 10%**

9% did not receive an alert from another source

# 2015 Survey

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- The purpose of the survey is to assess awareness, use, and subsequent protective action after receipt of a WEA message.
- 1334 respondents
- 55% persons with disability
  - 18% caregiver for person with disability

| Participant Profile    |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| <b>Total</b>           | 1334  |
| <b>With Disability</b> | 55%   |
| <b>Caregivers</b>      | 16%   |
| <b>Age Range</b>       | 19-94 |
| <b>Average Age</b>     | 51    |

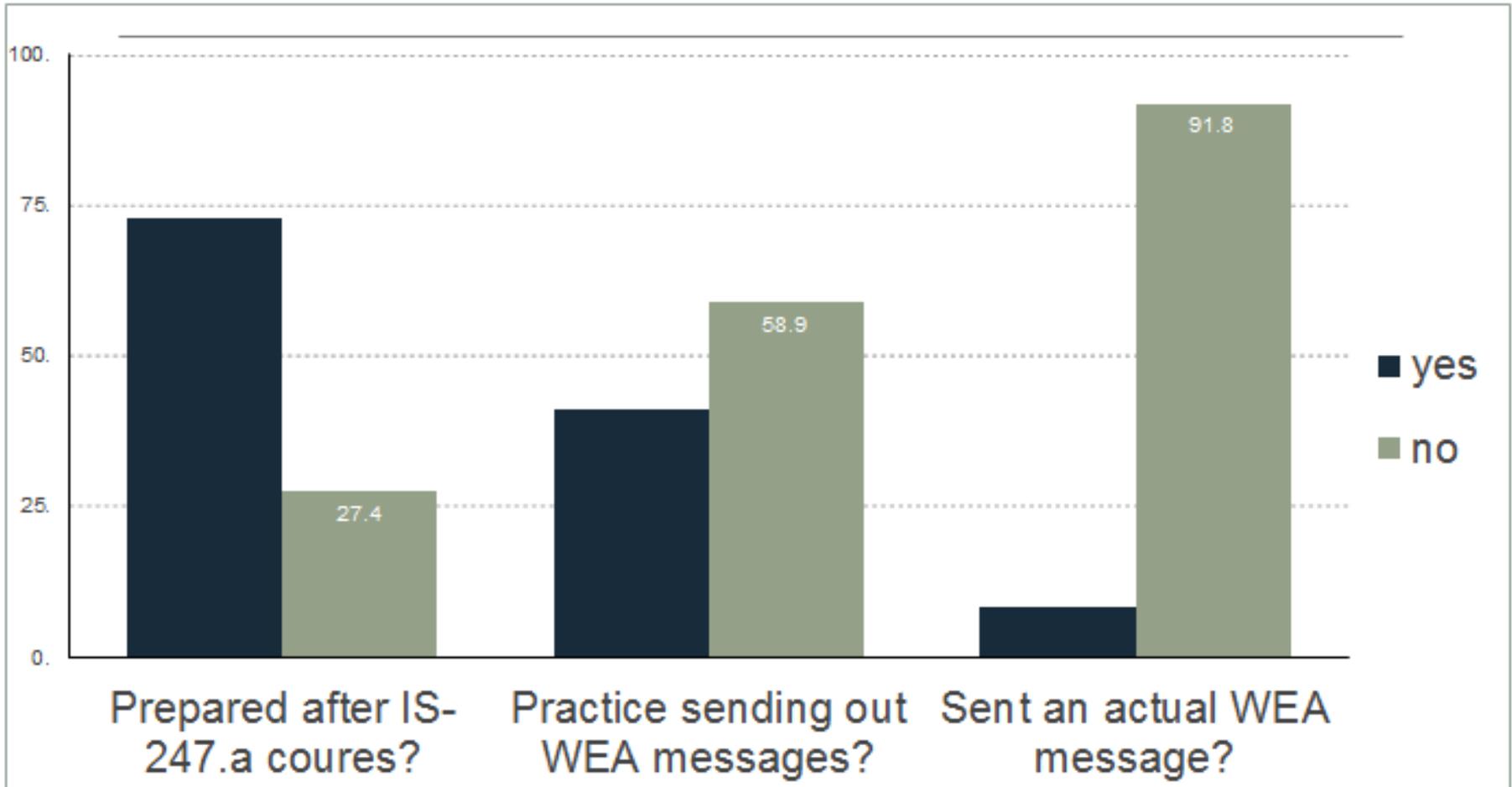
# Alert Authorities Use of WEA

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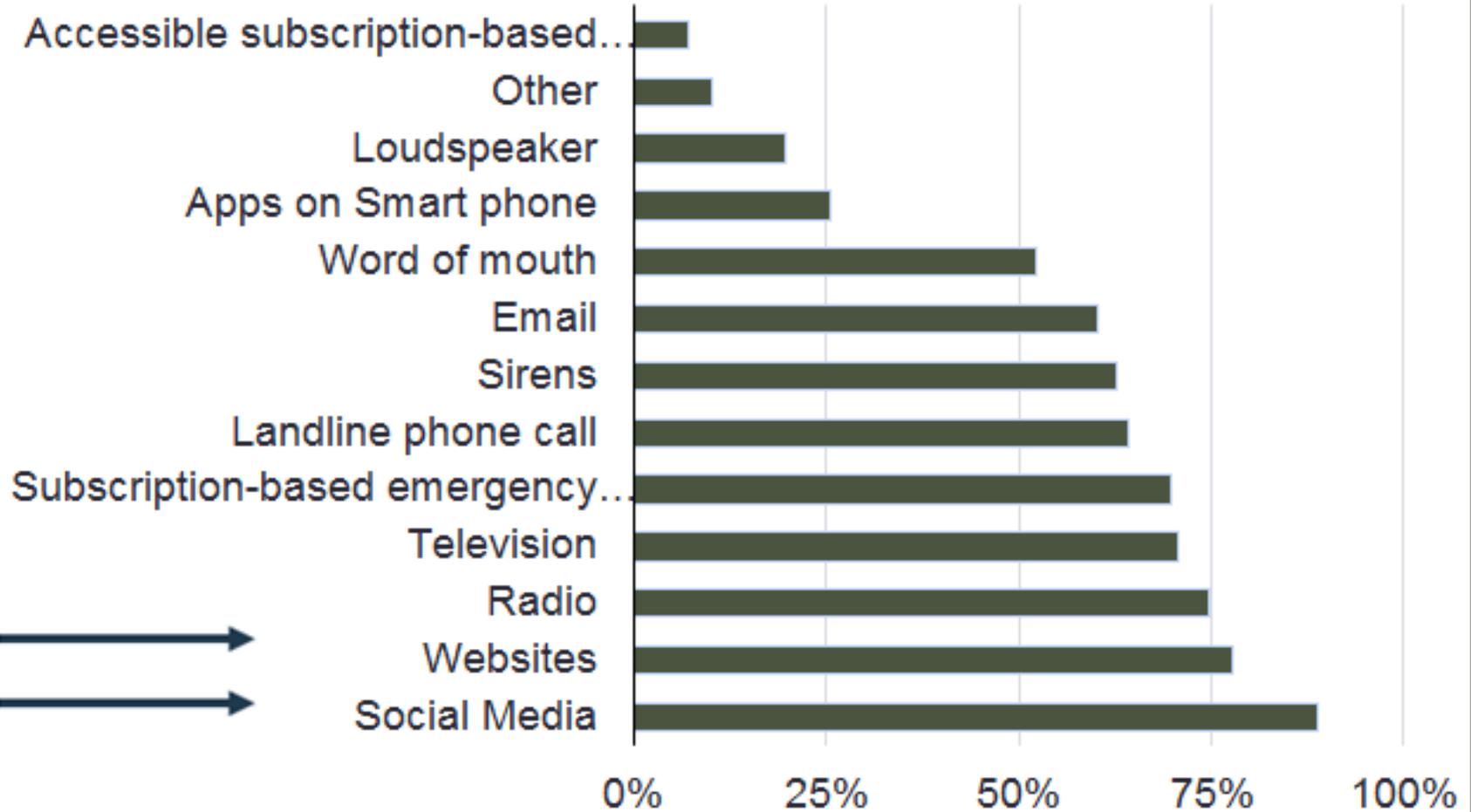
- 139 respondents of 425 alert authorities.
- 68% county-level representation.
- Multiple Regions
  - Rural, suburban, urban or coastal.
- 91% public information non-accessible.
- 7% send messages in another language.



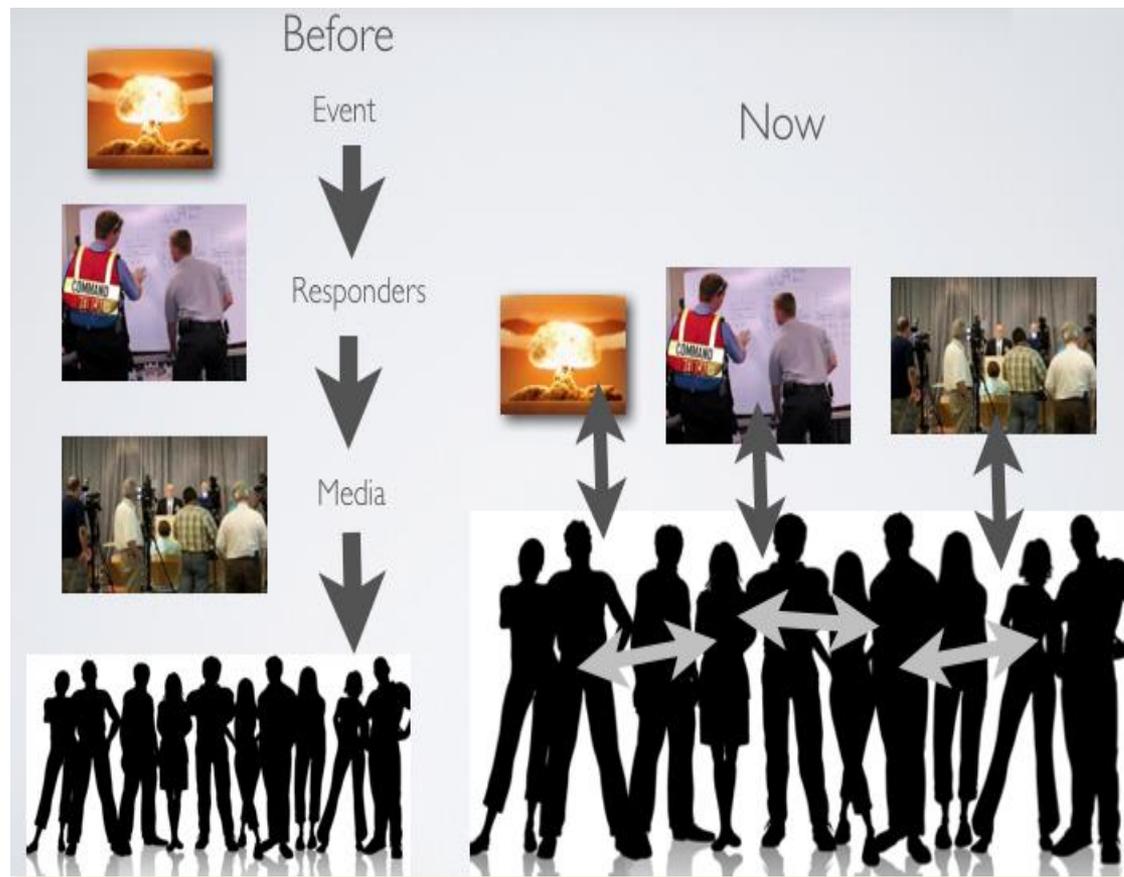
# Alert Authorities Use of WEA



### Other Methods Used to Disseminate Public Alerts



# The Paradigm has Changed



# WEA Findings (public)

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- Barriers to access were similar among people with and without disabilities
- WEA messages are an improvement over other means of emergency alerts
- Prior to taking our survey not everyone was aware of WEA
- Additional features are needed
- Social media is increasing in importance among people with disabilities
- No significant difference between the groups regarding protective action

# WEA Findings (Alert Authorities)

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- Majority of authorities are not using IPAWS for WEA
  - Require additional training
  - Would like the ability to test the system
- Additional features are required
- Significant rise in the use of Websites and Social Media for alerting
- Often not considering the needs of people with disabilities for alerting

# For More Information

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- **Handouts online ([www.cacp.gatech.edu](http://www.cacp.gatech.edu))**
  - 12 Considerations for Accessible Emergency Communications
  - Common Misconceptions Regarding People Who are Deaf and Rely on ASL
  - Accessibility Guidelines for Print and Electronic Documents



**Contact Us: [www.cacp.gatech.edu](http://www.cacp.gatech.edu)**  
**[www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu](http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu)**

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