

Zachary Hamill, CEM

Emergency Operations Manager,
Sutter County Office of Emergency Management

NON-COMPETITIVE DIVISION

This Wasn't A Test... And We Failed

This poster examines California's alert and warning evolution through three critical phases: failures, fixes, and building the future.

In the wake of 4 catastrophic events, California's alert systems proved fundamentally unprepared. Critical infrastructure was destroyed, counties lacked protocols, and officials didn't understand alert and warning's importance. These failures became headline news, sparking public outrage.

Recognizing the crisis, agencies began to overhaul. Emergency managers conducted after-action reviews, created new policies, and committed to mastering available tools. The state responded with legislation, guidance, and funding. Public trust increased, and California became a leader in emergency alerting. Some agencies now have dedicated alert staff, exercises, and training programs like 'Your Alert and Warning Program Sucks.'

Challenges persist: life-safety translation lags behind; geotargeting needs reform; and some elected officials still fail to prioritize alert systems.

Technology struggles with local dialects and character limitations during emergencies.

California's journey from failure to leadership offers a blueprint. We cannot prevent every disaster, but with proper tools, training, and support, we can ensure communities are warned and empowered. Join us in crafting the next generation of alert systems that serve all people regardless of language, ability, or location-our experience provides the foundation, your insights will shape what's next.

Presentation Theme: Advancing Public Safety Through Lessons Learned: California's Alert and Warning System Evolution Post-Disaster.

Collaborators, Advisor(s) and Department(s) that assisted with this research: Jorge Rodrigues.