

## POSTER SHOWCASE #IAEM2025

# THIS WASN'T A TEST... AND WE FAILED

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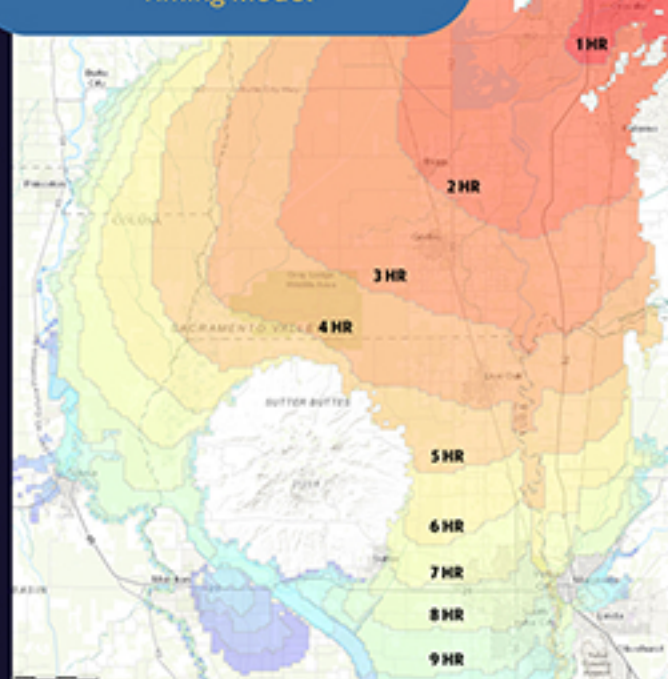
NON-COMPETITIVE DIVISION

FROM MISFIRES TO MODERNIZATION: ANALYZING THE PAST, REPAIRING THE PRESENT, AND DESIGNING THE NEXT GENERATION.

## PHASE ONE: WHERE WE FAILED

Between 2017 and 2018, California faced back-to-back disasters, including the Oroville Dam incident, the Northern California wildfires, the Cascade Fire, and the Camp Fire, among others. These exposed fatal flaws in our alert and warning systems: cell towers burned, evacuation messages weren't sent, and public trust eroded. Some counties lacked Alert and Warning plans, trained staff, and procedures. Decision-makers didn't understand the tools or the stakes. When Californians needed it most, the system failed, and 159 lives were lost to disasters.

Oroville Dam Failure Water Timing Model



News Headlines From 2017



Bumper to bumper traffic in Sutter County, CA during countywide evacuation in 2017 due to Oroville Dam



Deputies recovering a body after the Camp Fire in Paradise, CA 2018



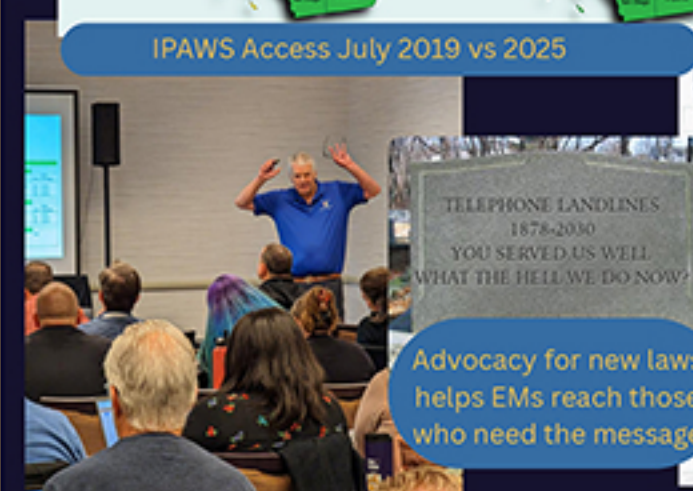
Before and after of Coffee Park community in Santa Rosa, CA after 2017 wildfires

## PHASE TWO: WHAT WE FIXED

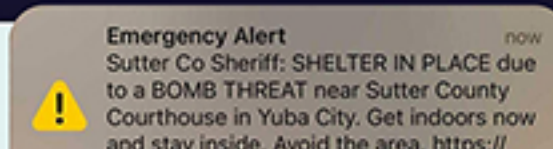
Significant legislative reform laid the foundation for improvement. SB 92 mandated Emergency Action Plans for high-hazard dams, SB 833 standardized statewide alerting guidance, SB 821 enabled counties to use utility data to expand alert reach, and AB 1638 advanced language accessibility by requiring alerts in languages spoken by 5% or more of a community's population. Operationally, emergency managers across the state invested in training, staffing, and coordination. The bluntly named "Your Alert and Warning Program Sucks" training helped agencies recognize and address vulnerabilities. This led to improved messaging, smarter workflows, and round-the-clock alert readiness. Cal OES released statewide guidelines and tools, supported by regional exercises, cross-jurisdiction collaboration, and the creation of local alert plans aligned with state standards. Public education efforts complemented the operational reforms. Local outreach campaigns increased awareness, expanded alert enrollment, and began to rebuild public trust. These efforts transformed alert and warning from an overlooked function into a core professional discipline, built to serve all Californians more equitably and effectively.



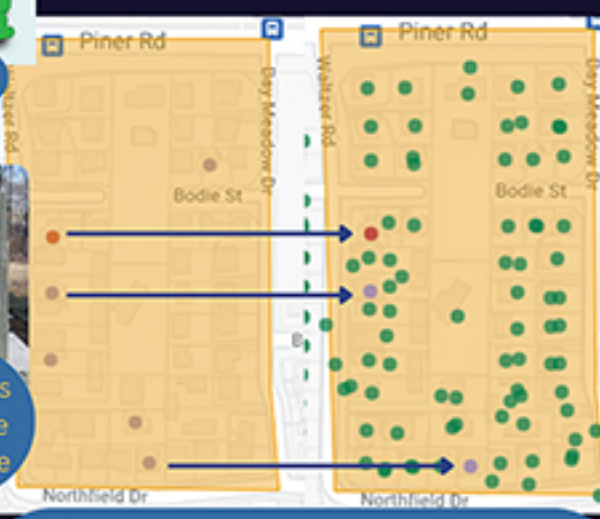
IPAWS Access July 2019 vs 2025



Your Alert & Warning Program Sucks! Training



Standardized Messaging Based On Research

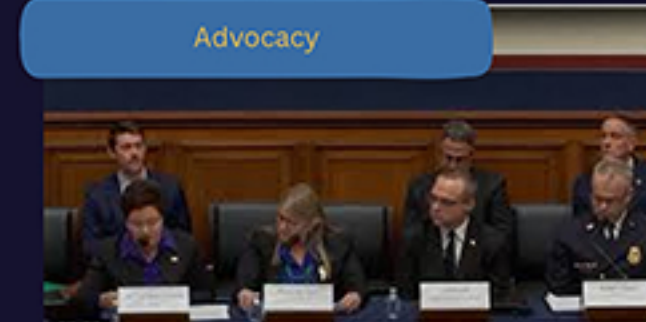


Side-by-Side Comparison  
Left: 9-1-1 Data  
Right: 9-1-1 Data and Utility Data (SB821)

## PHASE THREE: BUILDING THE FUTURE

Our next challenge is making alerts smarter, faster, and more inclusive. AI can help craft clear warnings in seconds and deliver accurate translations, while improved geotargeting will reduce false alarms. Real progress also depends on advocacy. Leaders and communities must continue investing in better tools, multilingual access, education, and trust. The future of alerting is collaborative: emergency managers, technologists, and the public working together to ensure every person gets the right message, in the right language, at the right time.

Advocacy



Use of AI to detect and send messages faster and more efficiently

Partial County Alerting through partnership with NWS



## CALL TO ACTION

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, and your insights will shape what's next.



SURVEY



SCAN ME

YOUR ALERT AND WARNING PROGRAM SUCKS — UNTIL EVERYONE GETS THE MESSAGE.

ADVANCING PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH LESSONS LEARNED: CALIFORNIA'S ALERT AND WARNING SYSTEM EVOLUTION POST-DISASTER