



## **CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK**

Campus Fire Safety e-NewZone

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### **Havoc in Hawaii thrusts mass notification system and the issue of public education during threat events into the spotlight**

Many people will recall the frightening events that unfolded in Hawaii last January when, through a mass notification system message, people were notified to seek immediate shelter due to an incoming ballistic missile attack. Thankfully this notice turned out to be a false alarm. When the official word came through about the false alarm, people were both scratching their heads over the confusion and breathing a sigh of relief that the threat wasn't real.

NFPA 72, National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code, addresses the latest safety provisions in fire alarm systems and mass notification systems for fire, terrorist, biological, chemical and nuclear events, active shooter, carbon monoxide, and weather emergencies. It is designed to meet emergency communications demands in individual facilities, multiple buildings operated by one entity, and entire campuses. Colleges, universities and schools often rely on NFPA 72 so that they can optimize campus and community safety, and comply with federal requirements. Military facilities follow the United Facilities Criteria and Chapter 24 of NFPA 72 for designing mass notification systems on military installations.



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The process of informing the masses about threats or hazards typically begins with an in-depth risk analysis of all possible scenarios; the people and processes potentially affected; response elements; communication methods and backups; system pre-programming and shutdowns; and training requirements. The following step includes devising proactive and reactive plans based on identified risks.

A key part of the plan is communications. In November, the [Hawaii Emergency Management Agency](#) began a monthly emergency notification drill. It was the first time the state activated an emergency alert program since the Cold War. Notification elements include an alarm that blares for 50-seconds, a 10-second pause, a 50-second wailing sound, and messages being broadcast on TV and radio.

Based on news accounts, it appears that Hawaiian and federal officials fell short in the area of emergency notification back-up plans. What stop gaps were identified for preventing human error or responding in the event of a misstep? What strategies were identified for reversing a warning or updating the public quickly?

Notification protocol was not the only thing called into question in Hawaii. News reports highlighting the human experience during those excruciating 38-minutes - showed that citizens lacked knowledge about what to do during a nuclear event. One concerned parent placed a child in a storm drain to minimize exposure. This reaction underscores how little people know about emergency response, and in particular, the dangers that exist within [confined spaces](#) such as storm drains, sewers and manholes. Unless you are properly trained on how and when to enter a confined space for work or for emergency response, it is not prudent to enter one - not even in the midst of utter chaos and concern.



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The harrowing false alarm in Hawaii reinforces the need for local and federal authorities and facility managers to ensure that they have a solid mass notification system in place. It also emphasizes the need for governments and emergency response agencies to educate citizens about ways to protect themselves and shelter during emergency events, including [nuclear blasts](#). As evidenced in Hawaii in January, the public needs to know what to do when catastrophes threaten so that they can keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

*NOTE: This article first appeared as a post on NFPA's blog, NFPA Today, in January 2018, and has been edited.*

Link to blog:

<https://community.nfpa.org/community/nfpa-today/blog/2018/01/16/havoc-in-hawaii-thrusts-mass-notification-and-the-issues-of-protection-and-shelter-during-emergencies-into-the-spotlight>

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