Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness

BC EMERGENCY ALERTS

COMMUNITY ALERTING

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS GUIDELINES

Information for First Nations and Local Governments

Version 3.0

December 2024

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Document Management

Document Owner

This document is maintained by the Public Alerting Team, Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness.

Version History

Version	Date	Notes
1.0	2022-07	Updated Emergency Alert Submission (EAS) form added
1.1	2022-09	Updated EAS form
1.2	2022-11	Updated ECC phone number; Updated instructions for completion of EAS form
1.3	2023-02	Updated link to EAS web form
2.0	2023-05	General updates
2.1	2023-10	Updates to processes and EAS form
2.2	2024-06	Update to priority ECC phone number, KML map options
3.0	2024-12	Update to EAS form; general formatting

How to Use This Guide

This guide contains practical information First Nations and Local Governments will need to send a BC Emergency Alert.

This guide is divided into two sections.

- The first section provides information Indigenous Governing Bodies and local authorities will need during an emergency when issuing a BC Emergency Alert.
- The second section provides additional information about the alerting process.

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SECTION 1
BC EMERGENCY ALERT GUIDELINES

FOR AUTHORIZED ALERTING AUTHORITIES

HOW TO INITIATE A BC EMERGENCY ALERT

Quick Reference Guide

Step 1: Ensure all three criteria are met

1. **There is a threat to human life.**
2. **The threat is immediate.**
3. **There are recommended actions that may save lives.**

If all three criteria are met, fill out an Emergency Alert Submission (EAS) form (time permitting) and proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Coordinate with EMCR

Call the BC Emergency Alert Priority Line at 1-855-952-5946

1. Ask for a BC Emergency Alert.
2. Be prepared to provide your identity and answer a few quick questions.
3. Complete an EAS form and submit on line or email the form with a map (preferably in a **.kml** file format) to EmergencyAlertRequest@gov.bc.ca.
4. If there is no time to fill out the EAS form, a Provincial Duty Manager (PDM) can help you. Tell them:
    a. The area of your community that is in danger.
    b. Instructions for the public that should keep them safe.
5. With the PDM, confirm the alert message details, including geographic boundaries.

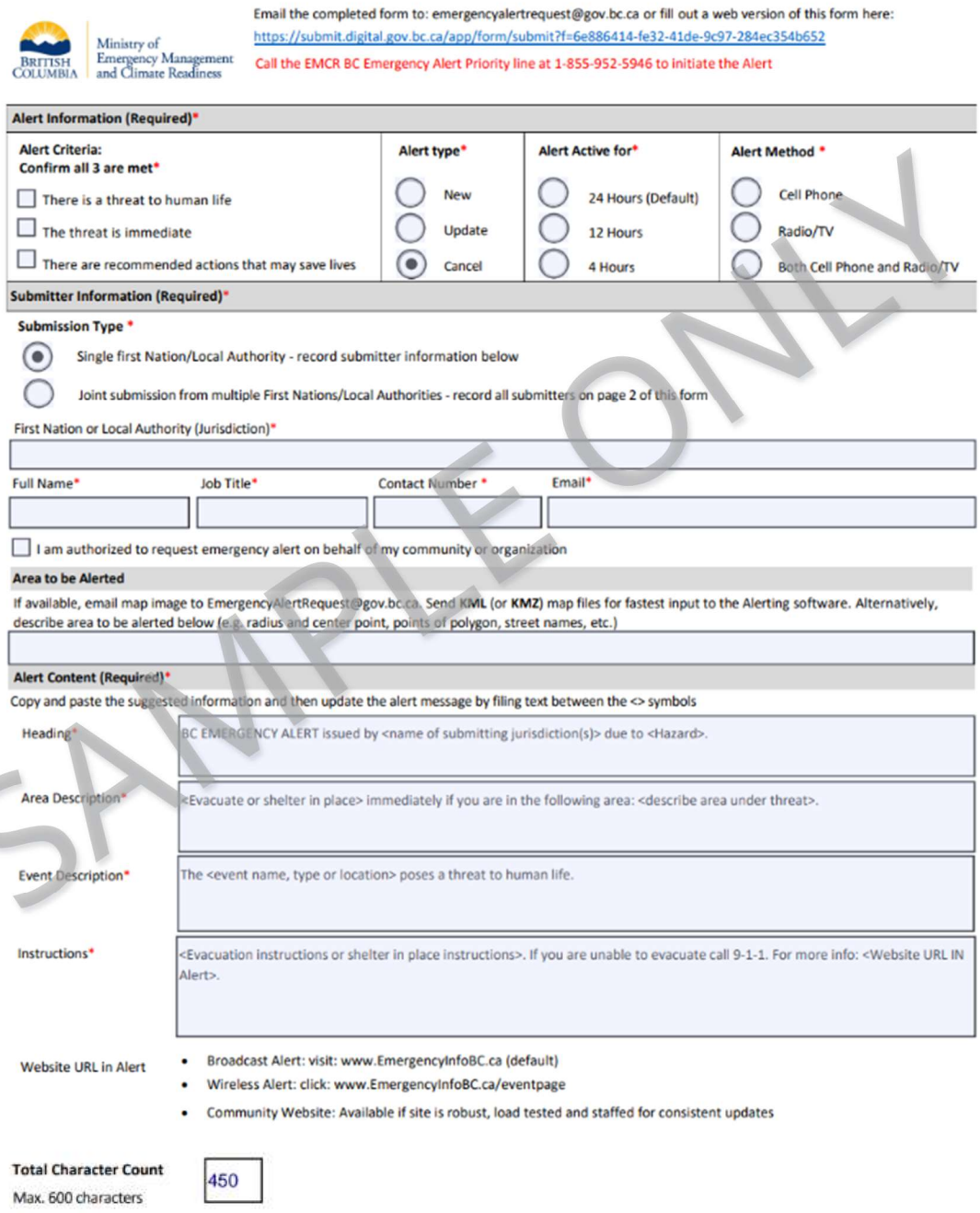
Step 3: EMCR will send the BC Emergency Alert

- The alert will be sent to compatible wireless devices on LTE or 5G networks, and/or radio and TV stations, in the impacted area.
- A BC Emergency Alert is in effect for the chosen duration identified on the EAS form, unless the alert is cancelled or updated.
- All BC Emergency Alerts should be cancelled when the duration is complete, or the threat has passed.
- Coordinate with EMCR to cancel or update your alert.

EMERGENCY ALERT SUBMISSION FORM

Below is a sample of the PDF version of the BC Emergency Alert Submission Form.

See Page 14 for instructions on accessing and submitting the form.



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Email the completed form to: emergencyalertrequest@gov.bc.ca or fill out a web version of this form here:
https://submit.digital.gov.bc.ca/app/form/submit?f=6e886414-fe32-41de-9c97-284ec354b652
Call the EMCR BC Emergency Alert Priority line at 1-855-952-5946 to initiate the Alert

Alert Information (Required)*

Alert Criteria: Confirm all 3 are met*	Alert type*	Alert Active for*	Alert Method *
☐ There is a threat to human life	○ New	○ 24 Hours (Default)	○ Cell Phone
☐ The threat is immediate	○ Update	○ 12 Hours	○ Radio/TV
☐ There are recommended actions that may save lives	◉ Cancel	○ 4 Hours	○ Both Cell Phone and Radio/TV

Submitter Information (Required)*

Submission Type *

◉ Single first Nation/Local Authority - record submitter information below

○ Joint submission from multiple First Nations/Local Authorities - record all submitters on page 2 of this form

First Nation or Local Authority (Jurisdiction)*

Full Name* | Job Title* | Contact Number * | Email*

☐ I am authorized to request emergency alert on behalf of my community or organization

Area to be Alerted

If available, email map image to EmergencyAlertRequest@gov.bc.ca. Send **KML** (or **KMZ**) map files for fastest input to the Alerting software. Alternatively, describe area to be alerted below (e.g. radius and center point, points of polygon, street names, etc.)

Alert Content (Required)*

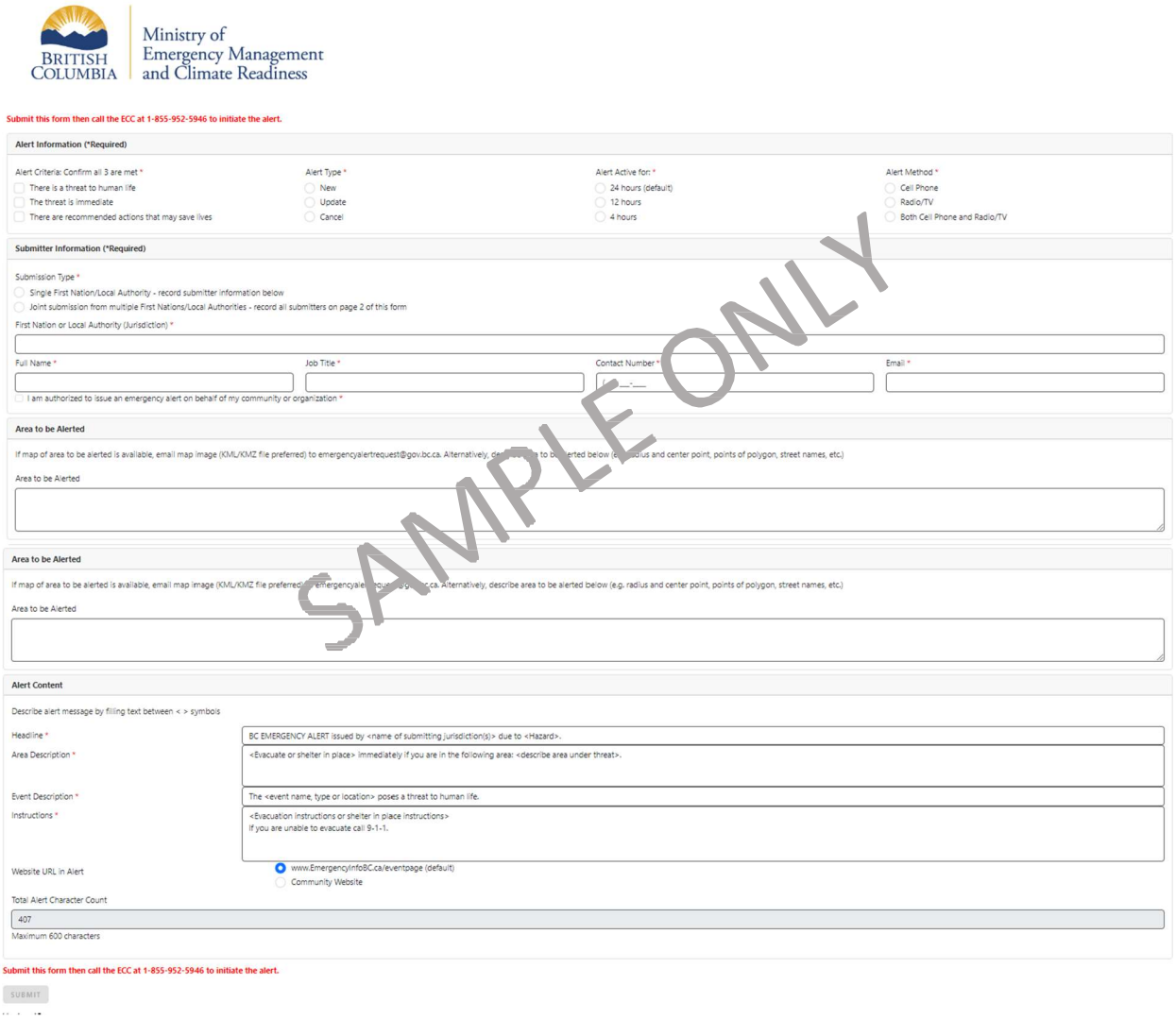
Copy and paste the suggested information and then update the alert message by filing text between the <> symbols

Heading*	BC EMERGENCY ALERT issued by <name of submitting jurisdiction(s)> due to <Hazard>.
Area Description*	<Evacuate or shelter in place> immediately if you are in the following area: <describe area under threat>.
Event Description*	The <event name, type or location> poses a threat to human life.
Instructions*	<Evacuation instructions or shelter in place instructions>. If you are unable to evacuate call 9-1-1. For more info: <Website URL IN Alert>.
Website URL in Alert	• Broadcast Alert: visit: www.EmergencyInfoBC.ca (default) • Wireless Alert: click: www.EmergencyInfoBC.ca/eventpage • Community Website: Available if site is robust, load tested and staffed for consistent updates

Total Character Count 450
Max. 600 characters

SAMPLE ONLY

The online EAS form is nearly identical, with instructions provided as you tab through the fields.



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Submit this form then call the ECC at 1-855-952-5946 to initiate the alert.

Alert Information (*Required)

Alert Criteria: Confirm all 3 are met *
- There is a threat to human life
- The threat is immediate
- There are recommended actions that may save lives

Alert Type *
- New
- Update
- Cancel

Alert Active for: *
- 24 hours (default)
- 12 hours
- 4 hours

Alert Method *
- Cell Phone
- Radio/TV
- Both Cell Phone and Radio/TV

Submitter Information (*Required)

Submission Type *
- Single First Nation/Local Authority - record submitter information below
- Joint submission from multiple First Nations/Local Authorities - record all submitters on page 2 of this form

First Nation or Local Authority (Jurisdiction) *

Full Name * | Job Title * | Contact Number * | Email *

- I am authorized to issue an emergency alert on behalf of my community or organization *

Area to be Alerted

If map of area to be alerted is available, email map image (KML/KMZ file preferred) to emergencyalertrequest@gov.bc.ca. Alternatively, describe area to be alerted below (e.g. radius and center point, points of polygon, street names, etc.)

Area to be Alerted

Area to be Alerted

If map of area to be alerted is available, email map image (KML/KMZ file preferred) to emergencyalertrequest@gov.bc.ca. Alternatively, describe area to be alerted below (e.g. radius and center point, points of polygon, street names, etc.)

Area to be Alerted

Alert Content

Describe alert message by filling text between < > symbols

Headline *: BC EMERGENCY ALERT issued by <name of submitting jurisdiction(s)> due to <Hazard>.

Area Description *: <Evacuate or shelter in place> immediately if you are in the following area: <describe area under threat>.

Event Description *: The <event name, type or location> poses a threat to human life.

Instructions *:
<Evacuation instructions or shelter in place instructions>
If you are unable to evacuate call 9-1-1.

Website URL in Alert
- www.EmergencyInfoBC.ca/eventpage (default)
- Community Website

Total Alert Character Count: 407

Maximum 600 characters

Submit this form then call the ECC at 1-855-952-5946 to initiate the alert.

SUBMIT

SAMPLE ONLY

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SECTION 2
INFORMATION ABOUT BC EMERGENCY ALERTS

What is a BC Emergency Alert?

BC Emergency Alerts are emergency alert messages that reach the public through compatible wireless devices and/or by interrupting regular TV and radio programs. You may know them as Broadcast Intrusive Alerts.

These messages are only sent when there is an immediate and life-threatening danger. The messages, sent using the national system called Alert Ready, include information about the hazard and what people should do to protect themselves.

What other alerting and notification tools are available?

Many communities have their own emergency communications tools**.**

A BC Emergency Alert DOES NOT replace those tools.

Communities may continue to use existing, non-intrusive notification tools and will be responsible for initiating public alerting during emergencies.

BC Emergency Alerts provide another tool to use during emergencies, but do not replace existing emergency notification and communication tools such as sirens, door-to-door notifications, social media, news media, or third-party mass-notification systems.

What is the difference between BC Emergency Alerts and mass notification systems?

Many communities in B.C. use local subscription-based mass notification applications (e.g. Alertable, Voyent Alert, Connect Rocket). Only people subscribed to the application will receive a notification. Visitors to the area will have to subscribe to the application.

The main differences between these tools and BC Emergency Alerts are:

- People cannot opt-out of receiving BC Emergency Alerts.
- People must opt-in to subscription-based mass notification systems. To receive the alert on a cell phone, the user must sign up for a service or download an app (Alertable, Voyent etc.) to their device.
- Everyone with a compatible device and in the affected area will receive a BC Emergency Alert, as no application is required to receive a BC Emergency Alert. This also applies to visitors to the area.
- BC Emergency Alerts are intrusive and will be broadcast to compatible cellular devices and or TV and radio stations in the impacted area.

People will receive BC Emergency Alerts on their devices regardless of whether they also have a subscription-based emergency alerting app. In some cases, the BC Emergency Alerts will also show up on alerting apps. Crisis communication experience shows that people often want to confirm the content of an alert with another source before they act.

When can a BC Emergency Alert be sent?

BC Emergency Alerts can be sent to warn the public about a life-threatening hazard such as a flood, wildfire, tsunami, or an extreme heat emergency.

There are two different categories of BC Emergency Alerts:

1. **Community Emergency Alerts** are requested by First Nations and local governments, as the Authorized Alerting Authority, and are sent by EMCR staff. The hazards that are currently supported for Community Emergency Alerting are flooding, and wildfire.

2. **Provincial Emergency Alerts** are both initiated and sent by EMCR. The hazards that are currently supported for Provincial Emergency Alerting are tsunami, wildfire, flooding, and extreme heat events.

BC Emergency Alerts are not appropriate for all situations.

They should only be sent if the three BC Emergency Alert Criteria are met

1. **There is a threat to human life.**
2. **The threat is immediate.**
3. **There are recommended actions that may save lives.**

Emergency Alerts can also be sent by other authorized partners:

- The RCMP can send Amber Alerts and alerts for civil emergencies related to police incidents.
- Environment and Climate Change Canada can send alerts for extreme weather events.
- Natural Resources Canada can send Earthquake Early Warning alerts.
- Public Safety Canada can send alerts for significant emergency incidents with broad impacts.

Limitations and Challenges Related to BC Emergency Alerts

BC Emergency Alerts have the potential to save lives, but they also present challenges and limitations.

Limited Cellular Coverage

Many areas of B.C. lack modern wireless coverage. This means that it is not possible to receive alerts through wireless devices in these areas.

Limited access to LTE-connected wireless devices

Wireless devices must be connected to an LTE or 5G network, or newer, to receive an alert. This means that some devices like older flip-phones will not receive alerts.

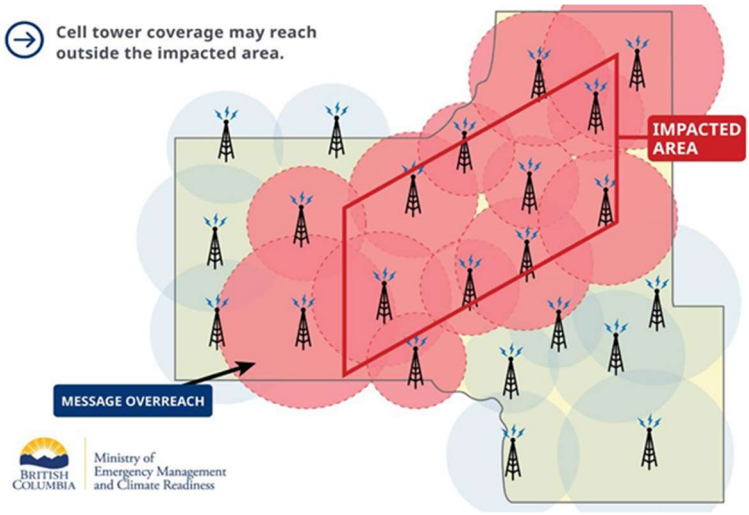
Reaching Vulnerable Populations

Barriers like disabilities, income status, and access to technology may prevent people from receiving or acting on BC Emergency Alerts.

Alerting Fatigue

When the public receives too many alert messages, they are less likely to trust alert messages or respond appropriately during an emergency. It is important not to over-use public alerting tools.

Alert Overreach



Alert messages will always reach people outside the desired warning area (e.g. all people in the radius of each cell tower in the alert area. This can inconvenience people and could potentially reduce public confidence in the BC Emergency Alert system.

Creating a BC Emergency Alert Message

BC Emergency Alerts provide critical messages required to protect public safety. These messages must be:

- Timely
- Consistent
- Clear
- Simple
- Concise
- Complete

EMCR staff will issue alert messages on behalf of the First Nation or local governments. No special training on the alert system is required by First Nation or local government representatives.

Alert Requesters will need to:

- Provide their identity to EMCR staff
- Confirm that the alert is authorized by their First Nation or local government.
- Send a map outlining the alert area or provide a description of the area to be alerted to assist EMCR staff to draw it on a map.
- Provide information and instructions for the public which will be included with the alert message.

The complete alert message must be limited to 600 characters or less. This is about 90 to 150 words, depending on how many letters are in each word, punctuation and how many spaces are used.

Mapping the Emergency Alert Area

Mapping the alert area is an important part of the process to ensure everyone who needs to receive an alert is reached. There are a few ways in which the impacted area can be identified. Keep the following points in mind when choosing how to share area information with EMCR during an alert request:

- A **.kml** (or **.kmz**) file map can be quickly uploaded into the mapping software to create the alert area. If possible, send a **.kml** (or **.kmz**) map file along with the EAS form.
- The impacted area can be drawn on the mapping software using a polygon tool. For a polygon, provide details on the boundary for the alert. E.g. the boundaries of the area under evacuation order – municipal boundaries; waypoints; major highways; intersections).
- The impacted area can be selected as a center point, with a chosen radius around it. Identify the location as a circle with a center point.
- An entire community can be chosen using a pre-populated list. The community selected will be alerted using the electoral boundaries.
- If you can provide the location with Google Maps, it will be easier to map your alert area.

Completing the Emergency Alert Submission Form

Tips are provided below for completing the Emergency Alert Submission form that is required when you initiate an emergency alert.

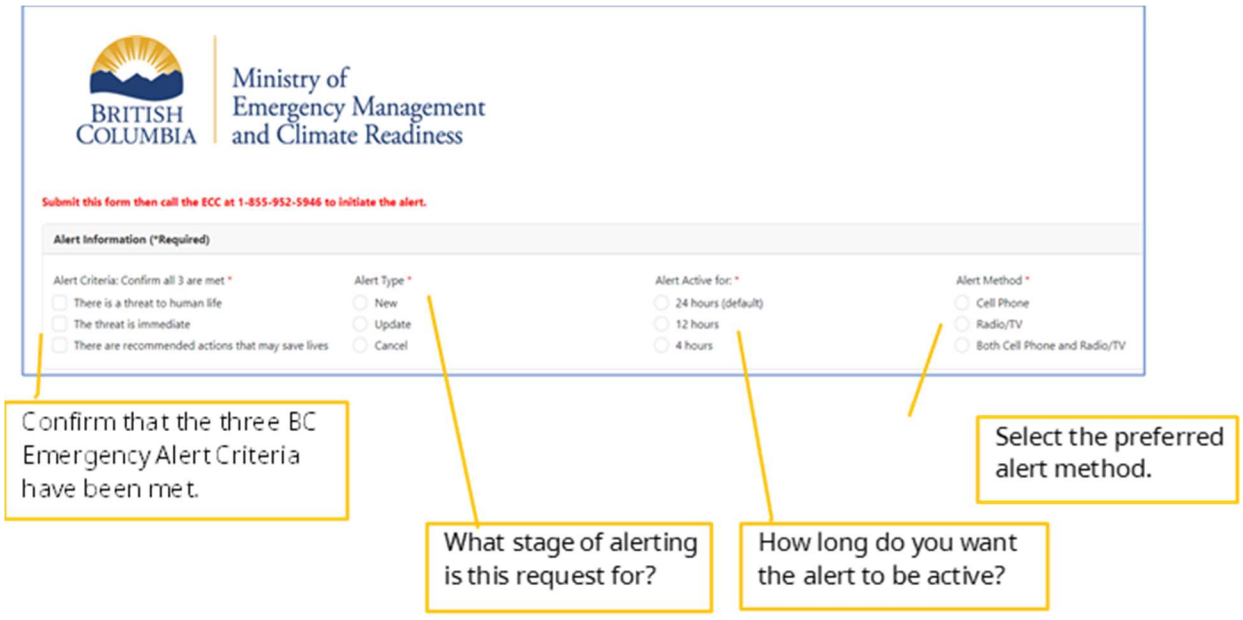
There are two options for submitting the form:

- **Online:** Fill out a web version of the form.
- **Email - PDF Version:** Download and complete the PDF version of the form. All, or portions, of this form can be completed and saved in advance as a ready-to-use template
    - Email the completed form to: EmergencyAlertRequest@gov.bc.ca

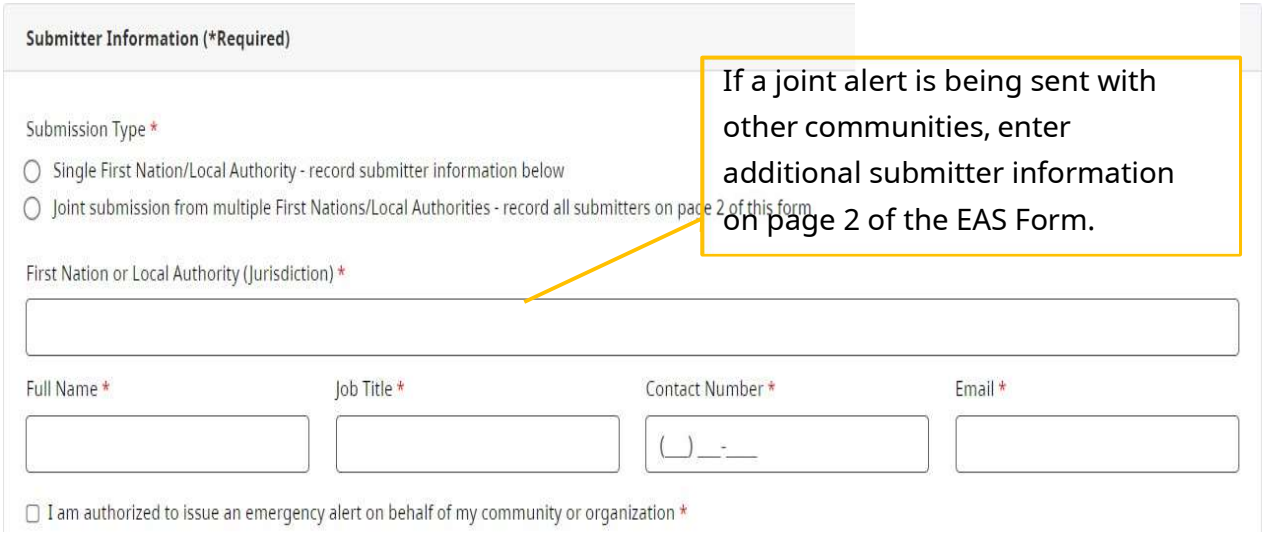
Alternatively, if you don't have computer/internet access, you can share information verbally when you call EMCR to request an alert. EMCR's team will assist you through this process.

In any case, always call the Emergency Coordination Center's **Emergency Alerting Priority Line at 1-855-952-5946** to initiate the alert.

Open either the PDF or the online version of the PDF form

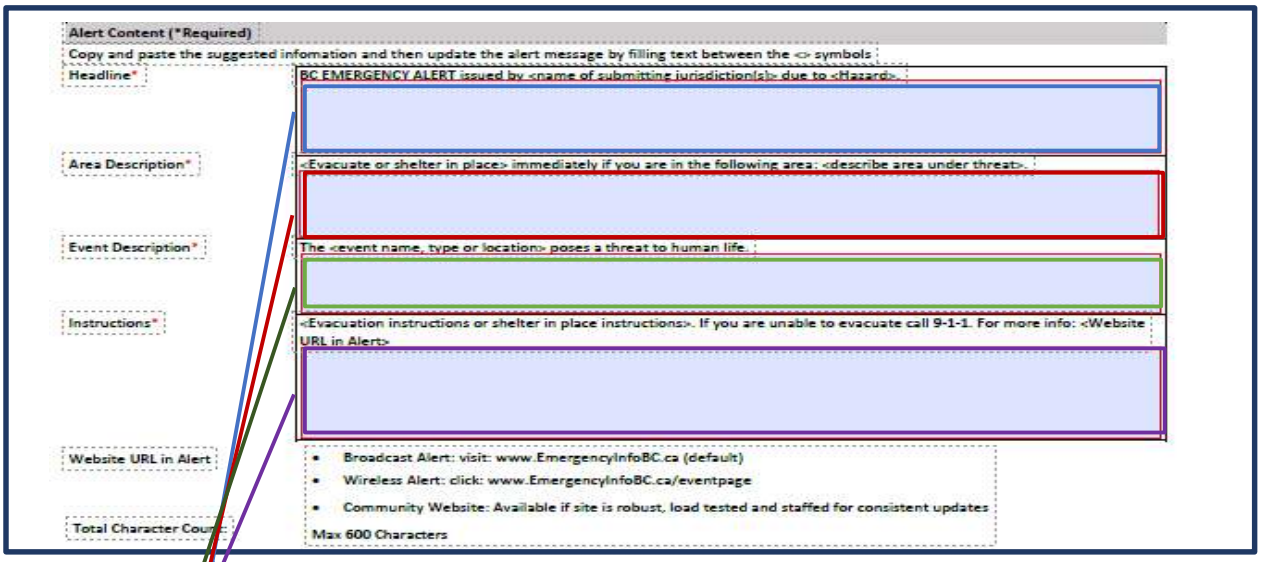


Provide your community and contact details



Provide a map (a kml file is best) or information to assist in the creation of a map of the area to be alerted.

Provide the message you want to send to the public.



What is it? Who is the source of the alert? A very short description of the event.

Where is it? State the impact area boundaries in a way that can be understood by locals and visitors. Use proper names when possible (street names, political boundaries, rivers, lakes, highways).

What is happening? What is the threat? What are the impacts?

What should people do? Tell people what protective action to take, when to do it, (immediately); how to accomplish the action (evacuate south on highway 5); how doing this impacts their safety or reduces harmful impacts.

Alert messages for wireless devices can be up to 600 characters.

Website URL in Alert Message

Components of URL to be included in the alert message:

- URLs contained in alert messages:
  - Should include the 'www.'
  - Should not include the 'http://' or https://
- For a Broadcast Alert use:
  - "For more info visit www.EmergencyInfoBC.ca" (default);
- For a Wireless Alert use:
  - "Click for more info: www.EmergencyInfoBC.ca/event/page."
  - Community Website: Can be used instead of EmergencyInfoBC if:
    - the website has been load tested for high volumes of traffic.
    - the community will have the time and capacity to update as required for the duration of the event.

Phone Numbers in Alert Message

- Phone numbers are typically not included in an alert message as they:
  - Can produce an unsustainable call volume;
  - Tend to be used as a general question line rather than for support related to the event.
- Exceptions to this guidance should consider the following:
  - Is the number connected to a well-staffed call center prepared to handle a high volume of calls?
  - Is the alert area very small and therefore not expected to have a high call rate?
  - Is the phone number vital to vulnerable residents requiring support?

If phone support is vital to the public safety of those impacted by the emergency event and local staff are prepared to handle the anticipated call volume, EMCR staff will always support the request to include a phone number in the alert.

After an Emergency Alert is Sent

Authorized Alerting Authority (First Nation and/or local government) Checklist

- Be ready to provide additional public information (social media, web page, public information line).
    - If this is challenging, contact EMCR for support.
- Be ready to contact Emergency Support Services (ESS) providers and neighbouring communities as soon as possible when planning the alert or after it is sent.
- The alert will expire after a maximum of 24 hours unless it is cancelled or updated. Please stay in touch with EMCR about your emergency if the alert needs to be updated or cancelled.

Alert Issuer (EMCR)

- After issuing a BC Emergency Alert, EMCR will post the alert details to the EmergencyInfoBC website and social media account. EMCR will also re-post/share any public safety updates made through the First Nation/ Local Government's social media channels.
- EMCR staff will remain ready to coordinate with alert requesters while the alert is active to provide support as needed.

Emergency Alert Channels

BC Emergency Alerts	Other emergency alerting tools used by communities
Radio/TV: Interrupts regular TV and radio programs with an emergency alert message Cell Phone: Sends alerts to cellular phones To LTE, or better, connected devices, e.g., 4G or 5G • Dependent on cell tower coverage • Check device compatibility by visiting www.alertready.ca • Device owners, broadcasters, and wireless providers cannot opt-out from these alerts.	Door-to-door notifications Sirens (tsunami etc.) Traditional media (regular news reports) Online communication (social media, websites) Mass notification systems (e.g. Alertable, Voyent Alert, and others). Some mass notification systems will automatically rebroadcast your BC Emergency Alert
Emergency Info BC: BC Emergency Alerts are posted on http://www.emergencyinfobc.ca and shared on X @EmergencyInfoBC	

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Key Contacts

To request a BC Emergency Alert:

Call the BC Emergency Alert Priority Line at 1-855-952-5946

This line is monitored 24/7/365.

If you have general questions about the BC Emergency Alert process, or would like to request guidance or additional information, please reach out to the Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) office in your region.

Southwest Region
14292 Green Timbers Way
Surrey, B.C. V3T 0J4
Tel: 604-586-4390
Fax: 604-586-4334
Email:
EMBC.SWEAdmin@gov.bc.ca

Southeast Region
101–333 Victoria Street
Nelson, B.C. V1L 4K3
Tel: 250-354-5904
Fax: 250-354-6561
Email:
EMBC.SEAAdmin@gov.bc.ca

Northwest Region
Suite 1B–3215 Eby Street
Terrace, B.C. V8G 2X8
Tel: 250-615-4800
Fax: 250-615-4817
Email:
EMBC.NWEAdmin@gov.bc.ca

Central Region
Unit 45, 450 Lansdowne
Kamloops, B.C. V2C 1Y4
Tel: 250-371-5240
Fax: 250-371-5246
Email:
EMBC.CTLAdmin@gov.bc.ca

Northeast Region
3235 Westwood Drive
Prince George, B.C. V2N 1S4
Tel: 250-612-4172
Fax: 250-612-4171
Email:
EMBC.NEAAdmin@gov.bc.ca

Vancouver Island - Central Coast Region
Block A - Suite 200
2261 Keating Cross Road
Saanichton, B.C. V8M 2A5
Tel: 250-952–5848
Fax: 250-952-4304
Email:
EMBC.VIRAdmin@gov.bc.ca