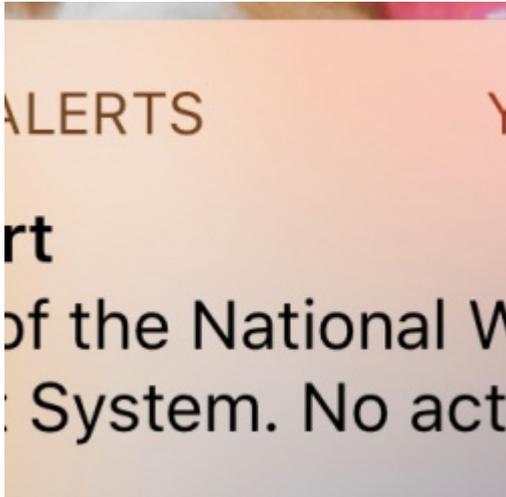


Presidential Alert System A Matter Of Public Health, Not Politics



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — October 4, 2018



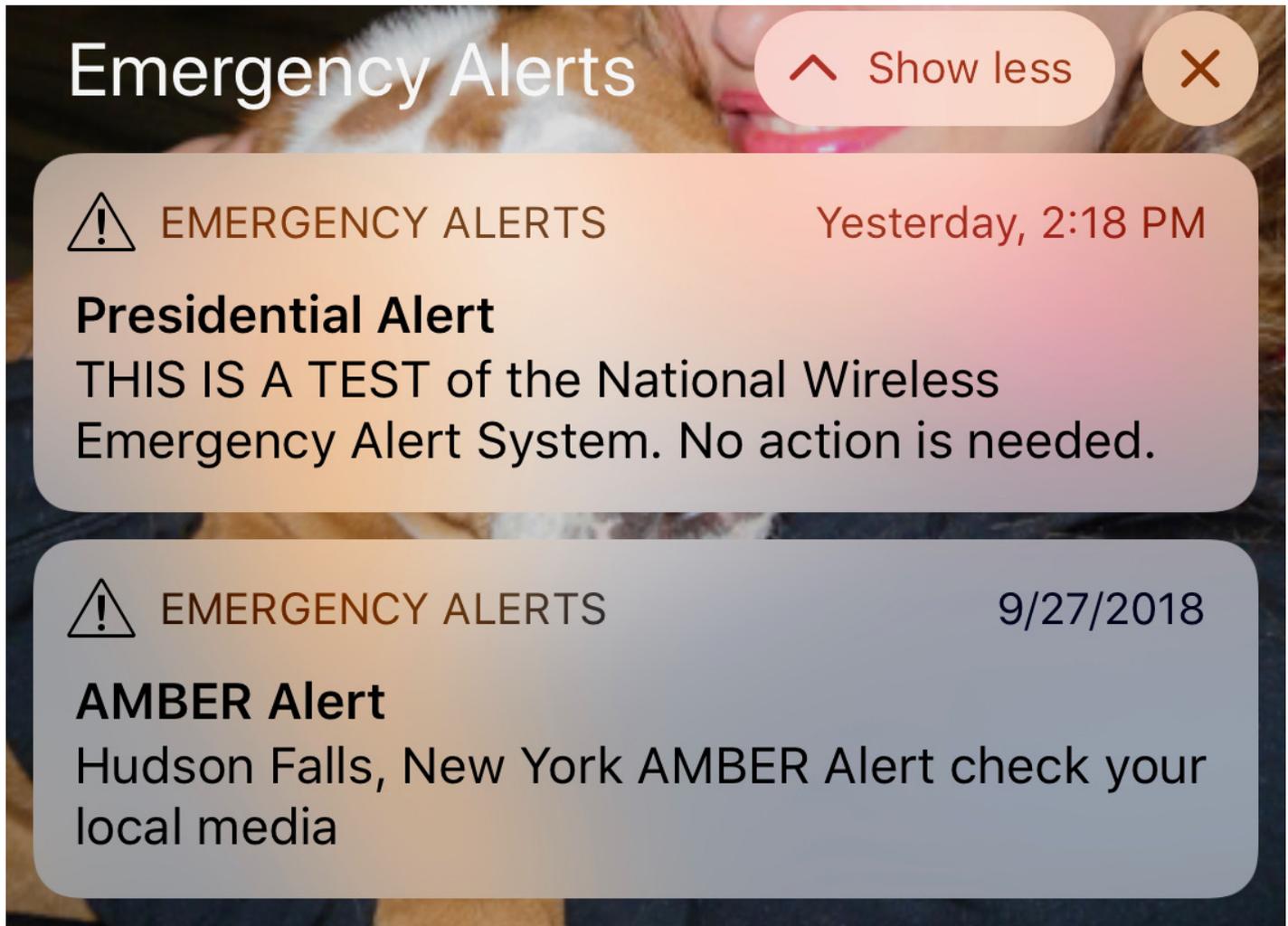
The alert on my phone.

Yesterday, most of the nation received a test of the following alert on our cell phones:



The message read: "Presidential Alert. THIS IS A TEST of the National Wireless Emergency Alert System. No action is needed."

This boon for public health and safety has been met with backlash because unlike the National Emergency Alert System tests we have seen on our television screens for years, the just launched cell phone version run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is called a "Presidential Alert." Branding it as such has prompted a rabbit hole of reactive social media rants completely mischaracterizing its purpose as a way for President Trump to bypass Twitter and access the public even more directly. In reality, this latest rollout is just an extension of prior programs like Amber or Silver Alerts and flood or alternative weather warnings that have appeared for a number of years now on wireless devices (but in various regions).



If anything, with the speed of technological advance, a countrywide version is long overdue.

As per [CNN's report](#) [1] of a senior FEMA official's account to reporters,

"The President will not originate this alert, say, from his mobile device... You would not have a situation where any sitting president would wake up one morning and attempt to send a particular message."

For those with those concerns, this alert system is operated by FEMA in coordination with other agencies depending on the nature of the crisis and the type of crucial, lifesaving messages in need of communicating. Given the relatively recent event in Hawaii of a phony missile scare getting

wrongly sent to the public and, in turn, terrifying people, FEMA has made considerations to avoid such an occurrence (e.g. multi-person approval is required before dissemination). And, for those worried about [privacy](#) [1], aside from contacting wireless carriers about the success of the test your data is not procured in the process.

It is a shame that even something like this is getting muddied by politics. Public notifications like Amber Alerts have saved children's lives. Silver Alerts have safely returned individuals with Alzheimer's Disease to their families. Severe weather warnings and updates have informed people's decisions during fluid, dynamic events where preemptive choices can be made to avoid imperiling citizens and first responders. During natural disasters and their common early power outages, people lose access to internet and television resources. Often, their phones are in service but losing battery at a certain point and can't be charged. The shrinking narrow window to reach those most embattled with an option like what can be delivered by this new framework can be life-altering.

This "Presidential Alert" methodology actually solves, or at the very least ameliorates, problems we experience when emergencies manifest. Many solutions today are aimed at problems we don't have and lead to adverse, unintended consequences. To sum up, this FEMA trial marks just how advanced we have become and how lucky we are to live in a period when the possibility of real-time help is literally at our fingertips. This is an incredible way to be proactive and reach people early to protect them and to deliver aid to those most in danger. Restrictions to reaching people under these evolving conditions ends lives, this system can help save them!

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[1] <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/03/politics/cellphone-federal-emergency-alert-system-test/index.html>