

The Office for the Promotion of Independent Living (OPIL) is in full support of the Federal Communication Commissions (FCC) requiring commercial mobile service providers participating in Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) to support a set of pre-translated WEA messages in English, the 13 most commonly spoken languages in the U.S., and American Sign language (ASL). This promotes the inclusion and ensures access for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals for whom English is a second language. This are people who are also at greater risk or experiencing hardships as a result of an emergency or disaster event.

OPIL strongly supports including ASL in a set of pre-translated WEA messages. The ASL translations need to be concise and effective at conveying the template alert message. OPIL recommends creating a few ASL translation alert messages with various pieces of information, especially when an emergency is time sensitive. OPIL recognizes that some alerts are too long to be conveyed in ASL. OPIL recommends the alert video be limited to 30 seconds or less and could redirect people to a website or another resource for additional information. For instance, the avalanche warning alert could be reduced from 34 seconds to half of the time by simplifying the alert message. For demo-only ASL videos, OPIL recommends revising the final videos to be more explicit with orders/clear directions of what the individuals who are Deaf need to do.

Additionally, OPIL recommends requiring participating CMS Providers to support a minimum resolution or video quality for the ASL video alert message templates. It is critical to implement the requirement for a minimum resolution to ensure that they are understandable to the recipients. ASL relies heavily on facial expressions, hand movements, and body language to convey meaning. Low-quality resolution or video quality can obscure these details, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretation of the alert message. Additionally, low-quality videos will not meet accessibility standards. It can be legally problematic and contribute to the marginalization of Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

OPIL recommends the use of Deaf talent and Deaf signer(s) who are native users of ASL when possible. In addition, OPIL recommends including the qualification of using diverse signers who have experience working at the disaster event(s) and are familiar with appropriate signs of these disasters. OPIL also recommends including video signers who are “certified deaf interpreter” (CDI) and deaf emergency responders because they possess a deep understanding of the Deaf culture, including customs, norms, and communication styles. CDI can share a common language and culture as the Deaf person. It leads to more effective communication and reduces misunderstanding for all Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

OPIL recommends that the video for ASL alert should be accompanied by an English language text of the alert, as indicated by the demo-only ASL videos. The demo-only videos include English language captions at the bottom of the video screen should be retained in the final translation. However, OPIL recommends the English text of the alert go be displayed in a larger size font to allow the individuals who are visually impaired to read the alerts easily and independently.