

# 2006 NOAA Public Alert Radio Distribution: Frequently Asked Questions

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A number of State Administrative Agents, Citizen Corps Councils and Emergency Managers have questions regarding the distribution of NOAA Public Alert Radios to our nation's public schools. In addition, some people have questions about the role of Citizen Corps Councils for their local schools. Please read on for answers to some of the most frequently asked questions.

## **QUESTION: What is a NOAA Public Alert Radio?**

**ANSWER:** Also known as the NOAA Weather Radio All-Hazards, NOAA's Public Alert Radio is a life-saving early warning tool that notifies radio users of all hazards in their area 24 hours a day/seven days a week, even when other means of communication are disabled. The radio will signal an audible alert with an visible indicator light as a "Watch" or "Warning" to advise on a wide range of emergency situations and post event information for all types of hazards including: Natural (i.e., earthquakes or avalanches), Environmental (i.e., chemical releases or oil spills), and Public Safety (i.e., AMBER alerts or 911 Telephone outages).

## **QUESTION: Which schools are receiving NOAA Public Alert Radios in 2006?**

**ANSWER:** In 2006, NOAA is completing its distribution to public schools in the U.S. and its territories. This year, 80,000 radios are being delivered to those U.S. public schools that did not receive these radios during the pilot program conducted in 2005.

## **QUESTION: Are NOAA Public Alert Radios being sent to schools in states that already mandate that public schools have radios?**

**ANSWER:** Yes. To ensure that they have the most up-to-date equipment, this year's distribution also includes schools in the six states that currently mandate public schools to have radios. States that mandate that schools have the radios include: Washington, Tennessee, North Carolina, Maryland, Florida and Mississippi.

## **QUESTION: Which schools received NOAA Public Alert Radios in 2005?**

**ANSWER:** In 2005, a pilot program was conducted, in which NOAA Public Alert Radios were distributed to 16,000 public schools. These schools included:

- All public schools in Alaska
- All public schools in Kentucky,
- Public schools in 20 jurisdictions in the Urban Area Security Initiative, including:
  - Anaheim, CA;
  - Atlanta, GA;
  - Boston, MA;
  - Chicago, IL;
  - Cincinnati, OH;
  - Dallas, TX;

- Detroit, MI;
- Los Angeles, CA;
- Houston, TX;
- Jersey City, N.J.;
- Kansas City, MO;
- Long Beach, CA;
- Minneapolis, MN;
- New York City, NY;
- Newark, N.J.;
- Phoenix, AZ;
- Philadelphia, PA;
- San Francisco, CA;
- Santa Ana, CA;
- Washington D.C./Northern Virginia area.

**QUESTION: Will non-public schools receive these radios as well?**

**ANSWER:** The funding for this project was provided through an earmark in the 2006 DHS Appropriations Bill to distribute NOAA Public Alert Radios to schools. The 2005 pilot and the current project will complete the distribution to all U. S. public schools. At this time, it is not known how much funding remains for further distribution of NOAA Public Alert Radios to additional categories of schools. When the current distribution is complete, the funding will be reviewed and a decision made regarding any additional distribution of radios to schools.

**QUESTION: Do schools need to request the Public Alert Radios?**

**ANSWER:** No. Please see the answer to the previous question for details on how the radios are being distributed.

**QUESTION: If a school already has a radio, what should the school do with the pre-existing radio?**

**ANSWER:** Schools should always check with the organization that provided the pre-existing radio to decide the best way to handle it. Possible ways that pre-existing radios could be handled include leaving it in the school or re-distributing it to another critical location in the area, such as an assisted living facility or day care center. Entities that previously provided schools with a radio and want more information on re-distributing a radio previously purchased with DHS Homeland Security Grant Program money can call the Department's Office of Grant Operations at 1-866- 9ASK-OGO (866-927-5646) or email [ASK-OGO@DHS.GOV](mailto:ASK-OGO@DHS.GOV)

**QUESTION: Is there anything different about the NOAA Public Alert Radios currently being distributed?**

**ANSWER:** The NOAA Public Alert Radios currently being distributed incorporate the latest technology and standards for advance notification of **all types of hazards—not just weather alerts.** Furthermore, the latest radios are **programmable to specific regions,** allowing recipients to hear alerts pertinent for their locality.

**QUESTION: Who will pay for maintenance, such as new batteries?**

**ANSWER:** The NOAA Public Alert Radio is provided to public schools free of charge, to help protect our nation's children by providing early warnings of local hazards. Once the radio is delivered, however, recipients are responsible for ongoing maintenance, such as changing the batteries.

**QUESTION: Are Citizen Corps Councils required to help their schools program and test the NOAA Public Alert Radios?**

**ANSWER:** Participation is entirely voluntary.

**QUESTION: If a Citizen Corps Council chooses to volunteer to assist in this project, where should it begin?**

**ANSWER:** If a Citizen Corps Council or program chooses to volunteer assistance to local schools, then the Council should first communicate with the local Emergency Managers and together plan a coordinated approach with the school district and Citizen Corps volunteers. Individual Citizen Corps volunteers should work under the direction of their Citizen Corps leadership. After reading the information found at the following links, Council leaders should **contact their local Emergency Manager** to coordinate your efforts:

- The letter sent to all Citizen Corps Councils on September 22 notified Councils that the radios were being distributed and what their potential roles could be: ([http://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/Radio/Letter\\_to\\_Councils\\_Re\\_NOAA\\_Radios\\_2006.pdf](http://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/Radio/Letter_to_Councils_Re_NOAA_Radios_2006.pdf)).
- Information for Citizen Corps volunteers who visit the schools can be found here: ([http://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/Radio/Citizen\\_Corps\\_Volunteer\\_Info\\_2006.pdf](http://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/Radio/Citizen_Corps_Volunteer_Info_2006.pdf))

**QUESTION: How soon should Citizen Corps leaders contact their local school districts to assist with the NOAA Public Alert Radio Program?**

**ANSWER:** Citizen Corps leaders should take time to plan and coordinate their approach to offering assistance. This program is an opportunity to work with schools on their preparedness and alert plans and to promote communication between emergency management and school districts on emergency preparedness and response plans. It is also an opportunity to connect Citizen Corps Councils to local educational leaders so that schools are integrated into planning and Citizen Corps resources support school district and school-level preparedness.

**QUESTION: What advance notification has been given to schools?**

**ANSWER:** On September 19, 2006, the Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools posted a letter introducing the radios to: the SEA listserv, four Emergency Response and Crisis Management grantee listservs, School Security Chiefs listserv (LEAs), and School Safety Center Directors listserv.

**QUESTION: How can state and local Emergency Managers and Citizen Corps identify schools in their jurisdictions?**

**ANSWER:** Although the names of the individual schools in each school district are available on the NOAA web site as part of the registration section, Citizen Corps and the

Department of Education ask that contacts by Emergency Management or Citizen Corps be made to the school district office rather than to individual schools. A coordinated contact to the school district office is important so that the school district, local emergency management, Citizen Corps and training resources can develop a district-level plan based on school district needs. Contact information for school districts is available on the Department of Education link: <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>.

**QUESTION: Is it hard to set up a NOAA Public Alert Radio?**

**ANSWER:** No. It is very simple to set up a radio. In fact, some schools may not even need assistance. For more information on setting up the radio, please see the Volunteer Information Checklist, located here:

[http://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/Radio/Citizen\\_Corps\\_Volunteer\\_Info\\_2006.pdf](http://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/Radio/Citizen_Corps_Volunteer_Info_2006.pdf). This document has a checklist for radio recipients and Citizen Corps volunteers explaining how to register, program and use the radios. You may want to partner on this project with your local American of Radio Relay League (ARRL) club members, who have experience in programming and registering the NOAA radios. Visit <http://www.hello-radio.org/clublist.html> to find a local chapter in your area. In addition, local Citizen Corps trained volunteers could also assist with the programming and registration of the radios. To contact a local Citizen Corps representative in your area, please visit [http://www.citizencorps.gov/councils/find\\_council.shtm](http://www.citizencorps.gov/councils/find_council.shtm).

**QUESTION: What if the NOAA Public Alert Radio is not receiving a signal or if there are other technical difficulties?**

If you are unable to establish reception for NOAA Public Alert Radios in your area or have other technical issues, a NOAA Warning Coordination Meteorologist (WCM) for your area will assist you. You can identify the WCM for your area at <http://www.weather.gov/os/wcm-soo.pdf>.

**QUESTION: Who should I contact if I still have questions about the NOAA Public Alert Radio?**

**ANSWER:** For more information, please contact your Warning Coordination Meteorologist through the National Weather Service's closest Weather Forecast Office. <http://www.weather.gov/os/wcm-soo.pdf>. You may also visit NOAA's program website: <http://public-alert-radio.nws.noaa.gov/proginfo.htm>