



## Changing times, changing needs

### FRPC asks CRTC to gather information in 2024 for a public hearing in 2025 on the broadcast of emergency alerts and information in Canada

#### CRTC Part 1 broadcasting application 2024-0194-1 (28 March 2024): Synopsis

In [early May 2024](#) the government of Canada noted that weather conditions for the spring and summer could increase the risk of wildfires that could threaten Canadians' health, safety and financial welfare. While Public Safety Canada is responsible for Canada's National Public Alerting System (NPAS) and emergency management, the department has no legal authority over broadcasters: the *Broadcasting Act* gives this jurisdiction to the CRTC (¶¶ [paragraphs] 4-5).

The growing number and impact of climate-related and other emergencies in the past several years led the Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC) to ask the CRTC on 28 March 2024 to review its 10-year old approach to the broadcast of emergency alerts and information in Canada.

Established in 1968 by Parliament, the CRTC first invited broadcasters to distribute messages about imminent and severe threats to life or property in [2007](#) – voluntarily (¶41). As few broadcasters did so, the CRTC decided seven years later to require all radio, television and distribution services to broadcast emergency alerts about imminent threats to life (¶54).

The CRTC's 2014 regulations require broadcasters to distribute the alerts it receives from the National Alert Aggregation and Dissemination (NAAD) system (¶¶7,57) that disseminates alerts received from authorized emergency officials (¶82). Considered the 'backbone' of the NPAS, the NAAD system has been administered by the Pelmorex Corporation since 2010 (¶¶48-50, footnote 362). (The CRTC has issued three orders requiring BDUs to carry Pelmorex' The Weather Network/MétéoMédia, most recently in 2018 at a rate of \$0.22 per subscriber per month, to enable Pelmorex' continued administration of the NAAD system; in 2017 the NAAD system's operating costs of \$2.3 million represented \$0.018 per subscriber per month: ¶¶65, 218-219.) The NAAD system was offline for three weeks in September 2023 after being hacked (¶115).

Since 2014 the number and impact of emergencies in Canada has grown. Wildfires accounted for 37 (3%) of the 1,309 Alert Ready alerts issued in the four years from 2019 to 2022: six times as many (230) wildfire alerts were issued just in 2023, representing 21% of Alert Ready's 1,076 alerts for 2023. In the five years before the CRTC enacted its emergency alert regulations wildfires led to the evacuation of 72,540 people in Canada; from 2014 to 2018 wildfires forced six times as many people – 221,670 – to flee their homes (¶172, Figure 12). The types of emergencies facing people have also changed: from 2000 to 2009 there were 49 injuries and deaths from shootings in Canada – in the following decade there were 226 such injuries and deaths (¶¶167-185).

It is unclear whether Canada's broadcast emergency alerts system is meeting people's needs. While the population's access to alerts distributed only by wireless services can be limited by severe weather and electrical outages (¶¶113 and 230), a broadcast service like CBC radio reaches 99% of Canada's population, is typically available 24/7 and can be reached by anyone using solar- or battery-powered radios. Yet FRPC's review of the alerts issued in 2023 found that 56% (657) of all 1,164 alerts about severe, urgent and imminent emergencies including evacuation orders were not distributed by broadcasters, but only by wireless services (¶¶221-221.1). In many cases alerts about the same emergency in the same locations were distributed by broadcasters and wireless services as well as by wireless service alone, but in some cases it appears that only wireless alerts were distributed – specifically, alerts about wildfires (7, 20, 21 and 22 May 2023, 28 June 2023 and 15 September 2023), a dangerous animal (8 June 2023), a forest fire (9 June 2023) and drinking water (28 November 2023) were distributed only by wireless.

One problem with the CRTC's current approach to emergency alerts is that telecommunications services can and do experience outages that reduce the reach of wireless service. During a major Internet service provider's Canada-wide outage in mid-2022, 42 emergency alerts were issued: the 36 alerts distributed only by wireless were apparently unavailable to subscribers affected by the Internet outage – and only 6 alerts were broadcast (¶249). A second problem with wireless-only alerts is that it is not clear whether all people in the area targeted by the wireless alert are being reached: while people aged 65 years or more devoted the highest number of hours per week to listening to radio among all age groups from 2013 to 2022 (¶¶222-229), almost half (45.9%) of the people in this age group did not have a smartphone for personal use in 2020. A third problem is that the CRTC's current regulations only require broadcasters to distribute alerts when lives are at serious risk, meaning that alerts about events that are likely to cause serious property loss but not loss of life need not be distributed: in 2023 no alerts were shown with respect to cold weather in Canada, yet cold snaps, hail and ice storms resulted in \$1.2 billion worth of insurance costs in property losses (Application, Appendix 16). Fourth, from 2014 when the CRTC enacted its emergency alert regulations for broadcasting to 2022, public and private radio and TV stations have reduced their staffing by 28% (or 6,820 full-time or equivalent positions): as the CRTC collects but does not report the amount of local news that these stations broadcast, there is no way of knowing whether important information is being broadcast to communities suffering the aftermath of emergencies.

Concerns have been raised publicly about Canada's emergency alerting system by Public Safety Canada's experts in 2022 (¶248) and by the Mass Casualty Commission in March 2023 (¶¶250-253). Public Safety Canada's Emergency Management and Programs Branch currently also [recognizes "a number of calls" to increase the effectiveness of the National Public Alerting System](#) (¶¶258-259).

The CRTC's *Three-Year and Departmental Plans* of the past nine years have assured Parliament that it has been monitoring broadcasters' participation in Canada's emergency alerting system (¶¶148-150), yet did not mention the Commission's decision not to publish any of the ten reports it required the NAAD system to submit about the system's performance and governance (¶¶151-161). Moreover, after stating in its current [2024-25 Departmental Plan](#) that 3.3%, 3.6% and 3.01% of broadcast undertakings did not distribute emergency alerts in 2020/21, 2021/22

“¶”: Application 2024-0194-1 paragraph number

and 2022/23, respectively, the CRTC did not describe any steps taken to ensure that the undertakings distributed alerts as required going forward.

In April 2023, however, Parliament for the first time specifically empowered the CRTC to regulate “the carriage of emergency messages” (¶18). A plan issued by the CRTC in May 2023 said the Commission might consult with Canadians on protecting consumer interests in Winter 2023-2024 (Attachment 1). FRPC’s March 2024 application therefore asked the Commission to gather data relevant to Canada’s broadcast emergency alerts system in 2024 and to invite Canadians’ comments on how the system is serving their needs in a public hearing in 2025.

After assigning application number 2024-0194-1 to FRPC’s request in mid-April 2024, however, the CRTC revised its *Regulatory plan to modernize Canada’s broadcasting framework* on 6 May 2024. The consumer-protection consultation no longer appears in the CRTC’s current plan (Attachment 1), and the plan does not refer to broadcast emergency alerts. The CRTC’s change to its *Regulatory plan* means that Canadians continue not to have answers to questions such as these:

1. How does the CRTC monitor broadcasters’ compliance with its emergency alert regulations?
2. Under what circumstances is it acceptable for some emergency alerts to be distributed by wireless services but not by broadcasters?
3. Which licensed or licensable broadcasters have not broadcast emergency alerts, and – given the 28% reduction in radio and TV station staffing since 2014 what assurances do Canadians have that the stations will broadcast these alerts in the future?
4. Has the CRTC undertaken any internal reviews of the effectiveness of its emergency alert regulations in broadcasting and if so, have these been published?
5. Does the CRTC know how many emergency alerts are distributed in both official languages?
6. Do Canadians believe they have been well-served by the CRTC’s 2014 approach to emergency alerts in broadcasting and, whether yes or no, how do they want Canada’s National Public Alerting System to change?

The lack of any public review of the broadcasting part of Canada’s National Public Alerting System from 2014 to 2024 means that Canadians and Parliament have no way of knowing if Canada’s broadcasting system will alert them to imminent threats to their lives or the lives of their family, friends and colleagues. FRPC is calling on the CRTC to announce a public hearing about broadcast emergency alerts in early 2025, to invite public comments on the broadcasting part of Canada’s National Public Alerting System and from now until that hearing, to gather and publish relevant facts about the governance and performance of Canada’s broadcast alerting system.

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Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC)  
Ottawa, 28 May 2024

[CRTC Part 1 Broadcasting Application 2024-0194-1](https://shorturl.at/91AaL): available at <https://shorturl.at/91AaL>

## Appendix 1

<b>FRPC: CRTC, <i>Regulatory Plan to modernize Canada’s broadcasting framework</i></b>	
<b>Summary of changes from May 2023 to May 2024 Plans, in order of May 2024 plan</b>	
<a href="#">May 2023: from Spring 2023 to Spring 2024</a>	<a href="#">May 2024: from Summer 2023 to Spring 2026</a>
Green shading	May 2023 consultation that is completed or in progress
Blue shading	May 2023 consultation whose timing has shifted
Pink shading	May 2023 consultation not present in (current) May 2024 plan
Yellow shading	May 2024 consultation not present in (former) May 2023 plan
Aqua shading	Gap – not present in either May 2023 or 2024 plans
Win/23-24 “Consultation on programming and supports for video content”	<b>Absent from May 2024 plan</b>
Win/23-24 “Consultation on protecting Canadian consumers”	<b>Absent from May 2024 plan</b>
Spr/23 “Consultation on registration of online streaming services”	Completed: <a href="#">BRP 2023-329</a> (29 Sept/23)
Spr/23 “Consultation on exemption orders and basic conditions of service”	Completed: <a href="#">BRP 2023-331</a> (29 Sept/23)
Sum/23 “Consultation on fee regulations”	Completed: <a href="#">BRP 2024-65</a> (21 Mar/24) [Google LLC filed for leave to appeal on 22 Apr/24 – see <a href="#">Court File Number 24-A-15</a> ]
Spr/24 Indigenous broadcasting policy	Spr/24: <a href="#">BNoC 2024-67</a> (intervention deadline – 22 Jul/24)
<i>Absent in May 2023 plan</i>	<b>New:</b> Spr/24 Described video and audio description
<i>Absent in May 2023 plan</i>	<b>New:</b> Sum/24 Closed captioning
Spr/23 “Consultation on contributions to the Canadian broadcasting system”	“a decision will be issued in summer 2024”
<i>Described as optional in May 2023 plan: “There may be additional consultations, including on establishing a new fund to provide financial support for participation in CRTC proceedings by persons and groups representing the public interest.”</i>	Fall/24 Funding public-interest participation (New section 11.1(1) The Commission may make regulations respecting expenditures to be made by persons carrying on broadcasting undertakings for the purposes of ... (c) supporting participation by persons, groups of persons or organizations representing the public interest in proceedings before the Commission under this Act .... 11.1(5) Regulations and orders made under this section may provide that an expenditure is to be paid to any person or organization, other than the Commission, or into any fund, other than a fund administered by the Commission.)
Win/23-24 “Consultation on local markets access and competition” (“...evaluate market access, news and local programming, and competitive behaviours”)	Win/24-25 Structural relationships: (~Section 9.1(1)(i)) {one-year delay}
Win/23-24 “Consultation on definitions of Canadian and Indigenous content”	Spr/25 News programming {one-year delay}
Win/23-24 “Consultation on tools to support Canadian music and other audio content”	Spr/25 {one-year delay}
<i>Absent in May 2023 plan</i>	<b>New:</b> Win/25-26 Inclusion and diversity (New section 3(1)(d)(iii, iii.11, iii.4, iii.6, iii.7))
“Phase 3 Targeting launch: Late 2024”  This phase will focus on implementing policy decisions listed above. More on Phase 3 will be included in future updates of this plan.	“Phase 3 – Implementing new regulatory framework (targeting launch late 2025)”  This phase will focus on implementing the policy decisions listed above. The CRTC will finalize the contributions online streaming services and traditional broadcasters will have to make to support Canadian and Indigenous content. We will also start to issue conditions of service that reflect how each radio station, television service and online streaming service should support the goals of the broadcasting system.

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		More details on Phase 3 will be included in future updates to this plan.	
<i>Absent in May 2023 plan</i>		<b><u>New:</u></b> Spr/26 CRTC Rules of Practice and Procedure (Section 21 The Commission may make rules (a) respecting the procedure for making applications for licences, or for the amendment, renewal, suspension or revocation thereof, and for making representations and complaints to the Commission; and (b) respecting the conduct of hearings and generally respecting the conduct of the business of the Commission in relation to those hearings.)	
<b>GAPS: Provisions added to 1991 Broadcasting Act in April 2023 and absent from its May 2023 and 2024 Regulatory plans</b>			
<b><u>Individuals' right to privacy:</u></b> Section 2(3) (3) This Act shall be construed and applied in a manner that is consistent with ... (b) the right to privacy of individuals; ... [and] Section 5(2) The Canadian broadcasting system should be regulated and supervised in a flexible manner that ... (g.1) protects the privacy of individuals who are members of the audience for programs broadcast by broadcasting undertakings			
<b><u>Information collection:</u></b> Section 9.1(1) The Commission may, in furtherance of its objects, make orders imposing conditions on the carrying on of broadcasting undertakings that the Commission considers appropriate for the implementation of the broadcasting policy set out in subsection 3(1), including conditions respecting ... ... (o) the provision to the Commission, by persons carrying on broadcasting undertakings, of any other information that the Commission considers necessary for the administration of this Act, including (i) financial or commercial information, (ii) information related to programming, (iii) information related to expenditures made under section 11.1, and (iv) information related to audience measurement, other than information that could identify any individual audience member; ...			
<b><u>Broadcast emergency alerts:</u></b> Section 9.1(1) The Commission may, in furtherance of its objects, make orders imposing conditions on the carrying on of broadcasting undertakings that the Commission considers appropriate for the implementation of the broadcasting policy set out in subsection 3(1), including conditions respecting ... ... (l) the carriage of emergency messages; ....			
<b><u>Administrative Monetary Penalties:</u> Part II.1 Administrative Monetary Penalties</b>			
Spr – Spring: <sup>1</sup> March - May	Sum – Summer: June - August	Fall – Fall: September - November	Win – Winter: December - February
<sup>1</sup> National Research Council Canada, " <a href="#">When do the seasons start?</a> "			