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The Civil Grand Jury Reviewed 329 Recent AlertSF Messages and Recommends Opportunities to Strengthen How the City Communicates During Emergencies. The Civil Grand Jury Recommends Citywide Standard for San Francisco's Emergency Alerts.

San Francisco, June 18th, 2026 – A new San Francisco Civil Grand Jury report, **Fog of Warning**, calls for San Francisco to adopt a citywide standard for the content of emergency alert messages and to expand the reach of AlertSF, the city's primary opt-in alerting system.

The Jury reviewed every publicly accessible message sent through AlertSF between October 2024 and April 2026 – 329 messages in total. The review found that none contained all five elements that thirty years of warning research has identified as necessary for the public to take timely protective action: who is ending the message, what the hazard is, where it applies, what to do, and how long it lasts. The national rate at which alerts contain all five elements is 8.5%.

The most consistently absent element is time. In 85% of the messages reviewed, recipients were told to take an action but were not told how long to continue, when the situation would end, or when to check for updates. Fewer than 5% of messages named the responsible agency.

"The gaps this report identifies are not in capability, but in the standards and processes that govern how that capability is used," said Stan Feinsod, Foreperson Pro Tempore of the 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury. "San Francisco's Department of Emergency Management is a capable operation. The Watch Center maintains protocols for incidents, staff complete proficiency tests and training, and the department conducts structured reviews after major incidents. What the system would benefit from is a citywide standard for what a complete alert message contains, and the resources to grow the audience it reaches."

The report identifies four areas where standards and process improvements would strengthen the city's alerting system:

- City-oriented emergency messages do not consistently include the five content elements that research has shown are necessary for the public to take protective action.
- Written criteria do not exist for when Wireless Emergency Alerts, the city's most powerful channel, should be used. In the absence of criteria,decisions are made case-by-case. The December 2024 tsunami alert was sent citywide despite affecting only coastal areas.
- The city's alerting protocols do not include closure procedures for any incident type. Many of the standard closure messages follow the same pattern – "the incident has been resolved" – without saying what changed, what actions can stop, or when the resolution occurred.
- AlertSF reaches a fraction of the people present in San Francisco on any given day. The promotional budget is not a dedicated line item, no standing strategy exists for reaching visitors and commuters, and no unified public destination exists for emergency information during an incident.

The Jury recommends seven actions:

1. The Department of Emergency Management should adopt a Citywide Emergency Messaging Standard requiring all city-originated emergency messages, across AlertSF, Wireless Emergency Alerts, the Emergency Alert System, and social media, to include the five content elements, with requirements for multilingual delivery and pre-send review step.
2. The Department of Emergency Management should adopt written criteria for when Wireless Emergency Alerts are warranted across all incident types the Watch Center handles.
3. The Department of Emergency Management should require a closure or follow-up message for every incident type for which an initial alert is issued.
4. The Department of Emergency Management should develop a dedicated audience growth strategy for AlertSF, including a standing approach for reaching visitors and commuters.
5. The Department of Emergency Management should publish a study setting out what it would take to fully resource that strategy.
6. The Mayor and Board of Supervisor should determine whether to resource AlertSF accordingly.

7. The Department of Emergency Management should establish a consistent, mobile-first, multilingual public destination for emergency updates referenced across all alert channels.

The Civil Grand Jury report **Fog of Warning** may be viewed online at https://www.sf.gov/resource--2026--civil-grand-jury-reports-2025-2026.

About the San Francisco Civil Grand Jury
The Superior Court selects 19 San Franciscans to serve year-long terms as Civil Grand Jurors. The Jury has the authority to investigate City and County government by reviewing documents and interviewing public officials and private individuals. At the end of its inquiries, the Jury issues reports on its findings and recommendations. City and County agencies identified in the report must respond to these findings and recommendations. The Board of Supervisors conducts a public hearing on each Civil Grand Jury report.

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