

The lay of the land

Understanding regulatory trends provides insight into where emergency communications is headed.

Emergency communications is quickly emerging on the regulatory landscape as a new standard in building design. Several organizations are jockeying for the leadership position. Which one will emerge with the dominant standard remains to be seen.

The following are just a few of the federal bodies already issuing related standards and guidelines...

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

NFPA 72 National Fire Alarm Code...

- **Chapter 6: Protected Premises Fire Alarm Systems** includes requirements for the operation and performance of emergency voice/alarm communication systems.
- **Chapter 7: Notification Appliances for Fire Alarm Systems** outlines requirements for the performance of notification appliances, including minimum sound levels for audible signaling and guidance to ensure voice intelligibility.
- **Annex E: Mass Notification Systems** explains the need to incorporate mass notification into fire alarm systems for certain occupancies and recommends minimum guidelines for the application of mass notification systems inside buildings as well as outdoors.

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Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA)

- **OSHA 1910.165: Employee Alarm Systems**, stipulates that employers provide an emergency warning system so that employees can safely escape danger in the workplace.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

- **FEMA CPG 1-17: Outdoor Warning Systems Guide** sets guidelines for designing public warning systems and describes “the benefits of using voice technology to address all natural and man-made hazards, including acts of terrorism.”

U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ)

- **The Americans with Disabilities Act** outlines the requirements for audible and visible warning systems.

Department of Defense (DoD)

- **Unified Facilities Criteria 4-021-01: Design and Operation of Mass Notification Systems** includes requirements similar to those of NFPA 72 in order to take advantage of available technologies and manufacturers.
- **Unified Facilities Criteria 4-010-01: DoD Minimum Antiterrorism Standards for Buildings** is intended to provide a “timely means to notify building occupants of threats and instruct them what to do in response to those threats.”

While government may be driving the emergency communications activity, it's clearly the life safety industry that is best suited to run with it. Fire alarm systems are inherently survivable in the face of a catastrophe. Their stringent testing requirements ensure a level of operational fitness unmatched among building systems. And the highly regulated standards they must meet achieves the level of reliability needed for emergency communications applications.



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