INCLUSIVE EMERGENCY ALERTS FOR COLORADO:

AN ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LANGUAGE AND DISABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

As disasters increase in frequency and intensity, news media, the public, and government officials have exposed issues with the ability to warn people with limited English proficiency (LEP) and people with auditory or visual disabilities. However, little research examines the extent to which current emergency alerting policies align with best practices for reaching these populations. The purpose of this study was to identify best practices for inclusive alerting, assess existing systems, and offer recommendations to improve current alert systems in Colorado that address language and access needs.

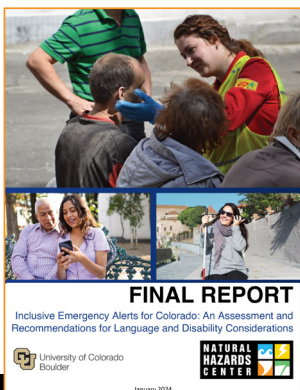SCAN FOR ENGLISH AND SPANISH REPORT

METHODS

62 | documents focused on emergency alerting language and disability access reviewed.

222 | survey responses from 57 of 64 Colorado counties.

36 | emergency management, alert providers, news agencies, and disability/language access advocates interviewed.

FINAL REPORT
Inclusive Emergency Alerts for Colorado: An Assessment and Recommendations for Language and Disability Considerations

University of Colorado Boulder

NATURAL HAZARDS CENTER

January 2024

INFORME FINAL
Alertas de emergencia inclusivas para Colorado: evaluación y recomendaciones para considerar el aspecto lingüístico y la discapacidad

University of Colorado Boulder

NATURAL HAZARDS CENTER

Enero de 2024

KEY FINDINGS

» Colorado's alert systems and processes are a patchwork that, while flexible, makes it challenging to provide consistent and accessible emergency alerts.

» Colorado relies heavily on opt-in emergency alert systems but most localities report opt-in rates below 40%. These systems create barriers for everyone, but especially those who don't speak English or who have disabilities.

» Given resource constraints, alerting authorities turn to resources that are available to provide alerts in other languages, but they may not align with best practices.

» Many emergency response personnel are interested in incorporating systems and practices that would make alerts more inclusive, but need more guidance, funding, and personnel to adequately do so.

» Technical and practical limitations of emergency alerts hinder most people and compound the challenges faced by those with disabilities and populations with LEP.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings and recommendations produced in this study are valuable for emergency managers, local and state officials, news agencies, and others involved in providing life-saving information during hazard events. The final report, available in English and Spanish, provides guidance on implementing new policies and practices to ensure that all people, regardless of language or ability, receive lifesaving emergency information.

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