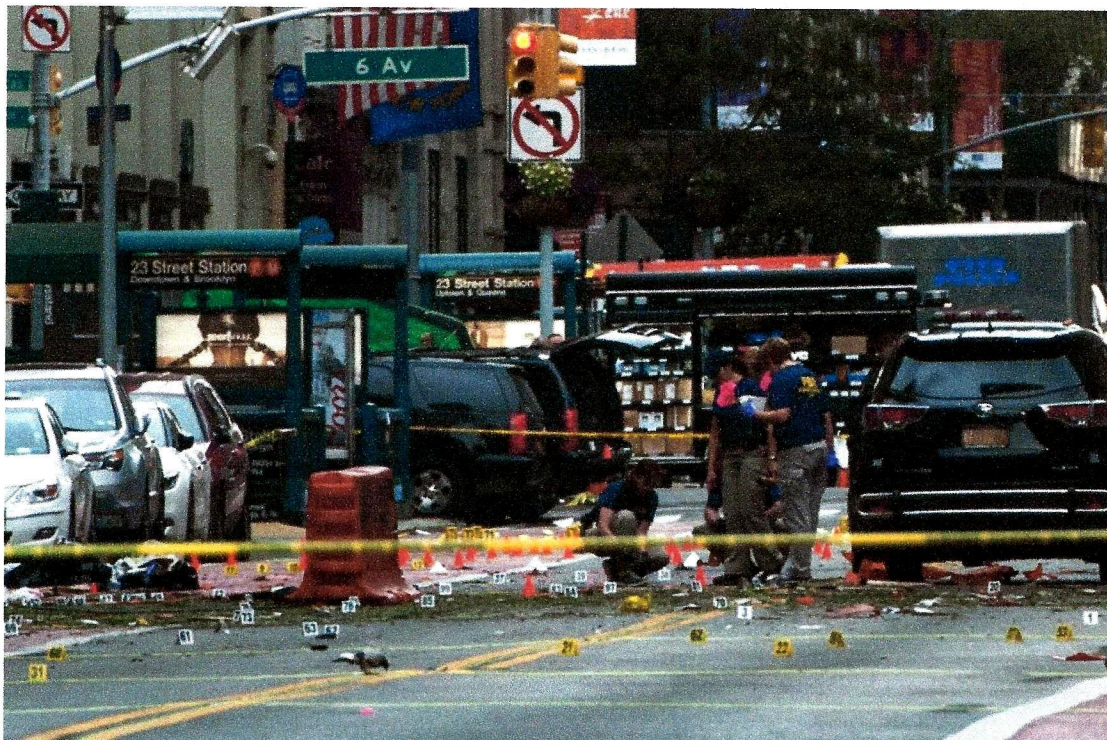


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## Mobile phone emergency alerts could soon be available in Canada

The CRTC is examining the possibility of wireless public emergency alerts warning Canadians of severe weather, emergencies involving crime, as well as environmental or industrial threats.



FBI agents review the crime scene of remnants of bomb debris on 23rd St. in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood on Sept. 18. The explosion prompted authorities to warn the public about suspect Ahmad Khan Rahami with a mobile phone alert. (STEPHANIE KEITH / GETTY IMAGES FILE PHOTO)

By **PETER GOFFIN** Staff Reporter  
Wed., Sept. 21, 2016



Mobile phone alerts warning Canadians of life-threatening emergencies in their area could be available within two years, wireless industry representatives say.

A version of the mobile alerts, in place in the United States since 2012, was used on Monday to warn New York-area residents of [Ahmad Khan Rahami](#), the 28-year-old charged in a pair of weekend bombings.

New York Mayor Bill DeBlasio said afterwards the mobile warnings were “very helpful in this instance, getting that message out broadly, putting everyone on alert.”

The alerts are similar to brief text messages, explaining in fewer than 90 characters what the emergency is and what action, if any, should be taken. Users receive a visual notification on their screen and a ring that is specific to emergency alerts — if their cellphone’s sound is on.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is examining the possibility of wireless public emergency alerts warning Canadians of severe weather, emergencies involving crime, as well as environmental or industrial threats.

A handful of federal departments are funding a pilot project in Durham Region to gauge the technical function of, and user response to, the alerts.

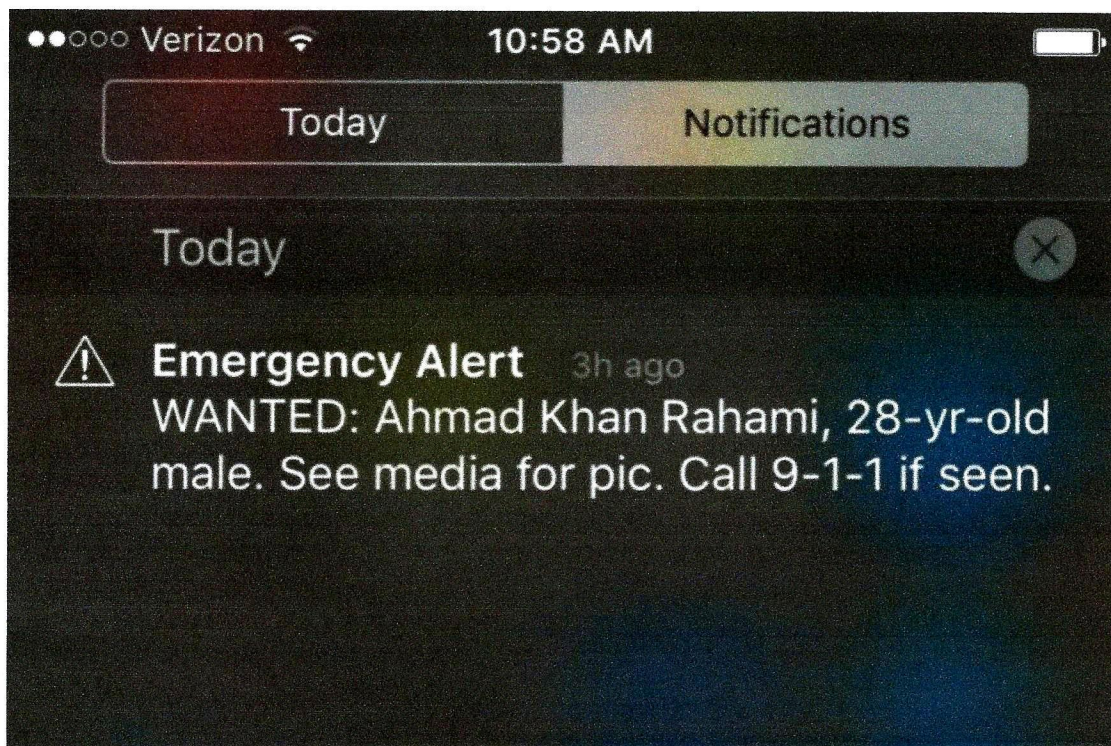
Beginning in April, approximately 20 mock alerts were sent to designated groups of mobile users, comprising about 100 emergency responders, students, small business-owners and people with special needs such as hearing impairment.

After each message, recipients were asked to complete a survey about their experience with the alert.

The final test alert was sent Wednesday.

Data collected during the pilot project will be turned over to the CRTC and a working group of federal and provincial emergency officials, who will determine the next steps, said Tyler Cashion, owner of a telecom business contracted to help lead the test program.





A wireless emergency alert was sent to New York area residents on Monday, Sept. 19, warning them of a man suspected in two local bombings.

The Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association, which represents Bell, Rogers, Telus and nearly 100 other wireless carriers and technology firms, said the public alerting system should be mandatory for all Canadian wireless carriers.

But the association estimated it would take about a year, and up to \$25 million, for wireless companies to establish a nationwide alert system, once the CRTC gives them the go-ahead.

The CWTA hopes the system would be up and running in two years, spokesperson Marc Choma told the Star.

Wireless Emergency Alerts have been in use in the United States since April 2012, arising from the Warning, Alert and Response Act, passed by Congress in 2006. The act called for a system capable of issuing pinpoint emergency warnings through “the greatest possible variety of communications technologies.”

Issued by federal agencies, state and local governments, alerts are authenticated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which then transmits the message to wireless providers, who forward the alerts to users connecting to cellular towers in the affected area.

American wireless carriers are not required to participate in the alert program, but FEMA says 61 mobile companies have signed up so far, including leading providers such as AT&T, Verizon, Sprint and T-Mobile.

Most often these alerts warn people of severe weather, FEMA says, but they were also used during the manhunt for the Boston Marathon bombing suspect in 2013, to assuage fears after false reports

of a gunman at Los Angeles's LAX airport, and for active shootings and missing child cases across the country.

**Read more about:** [United States](#), [Crtc](#)

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