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Area V – Protezione civile, difesa
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IT-ALERT AND INNOVATIVE TOOLS FOR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION.

How new technologies can
improve the effectiveness of the response in the
event of a major accident.



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LEGISLATION

Directive (EU) 2018/1972 of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 11, 2018, establishing the European Electronic Communications Code, introduced the **Public warning system**.

In Italy, the public warning system was first introduced by Decree Law No. 32 of April 18, 2019, with the aim at ensuring the protection of human life through mobile communication services for users affected by serious emergencies, imminent or ongoing disasters.

Decree No. 110 of the Prime Minister of June 19, 2020 regulated the mode of activation of the IT-alert system and defined the technical-operational features of the service.

The decree also established the Technical Committee, which is responsible for monitoring and updating the way the service operates.

From October 1, 2020, all operators would have maintained technological apparatuses (cell broadcast centers) at their premises to receive and transfer messages to all mobile phones in the specified areas.



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WHAT IT IS

IT-alert is the new public warning system that provides immediate information to the population. It broadcasts alert messages to mobile phones in a specific geographical area in case of upcoming or ongoing major emergencies or disasters.

Once broadcast, the IT-alert message is received by anyone within the area affected by the emergency who has a cell phone turned on and connected to phone cells.

The national public warning system integrates the existing information and communication methods for different risk scenarios in order to promote the rapid dissemination of early information on potential dangerous situations to the public and the implementation of self-protection measures in relation to the specific risk.



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HOW IT WORKS

IT-alert is a public service that sends messages to the devices in the area affected by a major emergency or an imminent or ongoing catastrophic event and helps providing timely information to potentially affected people, reducing individual and collective exposure to danger.

IT-alert messages run through **cell broadcasts**. Any active mobile device connected to the cell of mobile phone operators' networks can receive an "IT-alert" message provided it is turned on. Thanks to cell-broadcast technology, the IT-alert messages can be delivered within a group of geographically close phone cells, encompassing the area in which the affected part of population lives.

The cell broadcast also works in cases of limited coverage or in instances of telephone band saturation.

Devices do not receive IT-alert messages if switched off, or there is no signal and may not ring if the phone is on mute. The IT-alert service complies with the international 'Common Alerting Protocol' (CAP) standards to provide complete interoperability with other national and international public warning systems.



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WHEN IT IS USED

The IT-alert service, as required by the Directive (EU) 2018/1972 for public warning systems and the Italian Electronic Communications Code, is activated in the case of upcoming major emergencies or disasters.

From 13 February 2024, it is operational exclusively for the following civil protection incident scenarios:

1. Nuclear accident or radiological emergency situation;
2. Collapse of a large dam;
3. Volcanic activity in the areas of the Phlegraean Fields, Vesuvius and the island of Vulcano;
4. Major accident at industrial facilities.



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MESSAGES IN CASE OF MAJOR ACCIDENT AT INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES

Once broadcast, the IT-alert messages are received by anyone in the area potentially affected by the emergency with a cell phone switched on and connected to phone cells.

Users in the affected area receive a text message with a distinctive sound differing from conventional ring tones. The text begins with the indication "IT-alert," the message's sender.

The messages vary depending on the emergency scenario and for each type of risk, a designated authority has been identified as responsible for requesting the activation of the IT-Alert message from the Civil Protection Department (DPC).



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In case of real danger from a major accident at an industrial facility, the authority responsible for sending the IT-Alert message is the **Prefect**, as the coordinator for the implementation of the External Emergency Plan (**PEE**).

The IT-Alert message is manually sent by the Civil Protection Department (DPC) upon request from the competent Prefecture – Government Territorial Office (UTG).

Cell phone users in the areas near the affected facilities will receive such an IT-alert message:

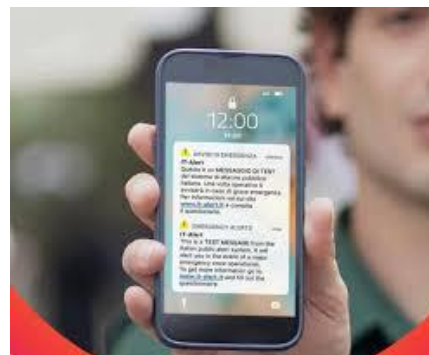


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MESSAGES IN CASE OF MAJOR ACCIDENT AT INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES

*“Civil Protection Alert DD/MM/YY at 00:00 - Accident at the XYZ
industrial facility involving hazardous substances in the
Municipality of XYZ (PROVINCE). FIND INDOOR SHELTER AND
DO NOT GO NEAR the facility. Keep up to date and follow the
instructions of the authorities”.*



The IT-alert message will be sent to the cell phones of anyone **within a 2 km radius** of the facility, informing them of the possible danger.



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The message may vary depending on the actual conditions of the ongoing scenario and, after careful assessment by the **Prefect**, it may be followed—again based on the Prefect's instructions to the **Civil Protection Department (DPC)**—by a **second message** providing citizens with guidance on actions and behaviors to adopt for self-protection, based on the measures already implemented.

In the event of an emergency requiring **sheltering indoors**, for the population affected by the scenario outlined in the **External Emergency Plan (PEE)**, the **Prefect** must refer to the information sheets for the public, which include **safety measures and behavioral guidelines** to be followed. The IT-Alert message must be disseminated in **Italian** and also in **English**, to inform any foreign nationals who may be present in the area.

In accordance with the **CAP-IT Operational Guidelines**, the IT-Alert message remains active within the target area for **12 hours**, unless a decision is made to interrupt or resend it, in coordination with the authority responsible for sending the message.



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Currently, over 900 industrial facilities in Italy use specific hazardous substances in their activities and are thus classified as being at "major accident risk".

An accident in such facilities can lead to a fire, explosion, or toxic cloud with immediate or delayed severe danger to human health and the environment.

The industrial risk of major accidents is regulated by European legislation, which has also been established at the national and regional level following major accidents such as the Italian Seveso accident in 1976.

To reduce the time needed for the manual transmission of the IT-Alert message in such events, reference is made to the geo-referenced dataset of industrial facilities subject to the Seveso Directive, provided by ISPRA.



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TEST

The IT-alert system is not operational yet for all scenarios provided for in the regulations.

The underlying reason is that additional examination and testing are necessary for some of these, requiring the extension of the testing phase for another year.

More specifically, the scenarios for which the prolongation of the testing phase was set are the following:

- Earthquake-generated tsunamis;
- Stromboli volcanic activity;
- Heavy rainfall.



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However, **IT-alert alone is not enough!**

It requires, in fact, risk awareness among the people receiving the message, which is achieved through knowledge of the territory, civil protection planning and proper behavior in emergency situations.



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SOURCES:

- <https://www.it-alert.gov.it/it/>
- <https://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/static/7ee2bcd0ed94114871ae76385ede8d94/all5-it-alert-io-rischio-industriale-0.pdf>



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THANK YOU FOR ATTENTION!

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