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A photograph of a small boat on a dark, choppy sea under a grey, overcast sky. A large flock of birds is flying in the air above the boat. The image is used as a background for the main text.

# As Texas Deals with Harvey, Another Storm Brews in Washington, DC between the FCC and Wireless Signal Carriers over Alert Messaging

messaging)

A recent article in "Recode" (<https://www.recode.net/2017/8/26/16205010/hurricane-harvey-texas-att-verizon-wireless-telecom-emergency-alert-system>)," a tech news publication, details a current debate between the Federal Communications Commission and wireless carriers regarding emergency alerts that first responders around the country are able to send to smartphones.

According to the article, the FCC's efforts to bring the wireless emergency alert system (text-based alerts), or WEA, into the digital age with, for example, multimedia and foreign-language support, have been met with skepticism or opposition from some major wireless carriers and tech companies. Since 2012, authorities have used these messages to warn citizens about emergency situations such as rising floods, abducted children and violent criminals at large.

Carriers have cited technically difficult, costly implementation, and network congestion as reasons for their opposition. Tech companies also have lobbied the agency against some proposed rules that might put more burden on them for delivering emergency alerts to smartphones.

For many citizens, wireless alerts that do not impact them can be looked at as annoyances, but most of these quick text blasts can be disabled through a smartphone's notifications or settings page. To public-safety officials, however, the alerts are a lifeline for dispatching critical, real-time information during a disaster.



*Tropical Storm Harvey continues to flood the streets of Houston.*

Officials in Harris County, Texas -- home to Houston -- voiced their concerns in July with a letter to the FCC, stating they rarely use the WEA because they do not want to potentially alert the entire county when a WEA message may only pertain to a certain portion of the county. With Hurricane Harvey continuing to wreak havoc in the southeast, these officials are frustrated with not being able to easily send alerts about flooding and other hazards to the specific parts of Texas, one of the most populous in the United States, being impacted by the storm.

As Texas turns from the issue to focus on the task at hand, the

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focus on the task at hand -- the safety of their residents impacted by Harvey -- the debate rages on in Washington. And while some changes were made in 2016 including the order to increase the maximum length of a wireless emergency alert, other potential ideas such as including multimedia capabilities will keep the talks going for the foreseeable future.

Click here to read the article in its entirety (<https://www.recode.net/2017/8/26/16205010/hurricane-harvey-texas-att-verizon-wireless-telecom-emergency-alert-system>).

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