OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR

September 18, 2026

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SUBJECT: Audit Report of San Antonio Fire Department City Disaster Alert and Warning System

Mayor and Council Members:

We are pleased to send you the final report of the San Antonio Fire Department City Disaster Alert and Warning System. This audit began in November 2025 and concluded with an exit meeting with department management in August 2026. Management's verbatim response is included in Appendix B of the report. The San Antonio Fire Department management and staff should be commended for their cooperation and assistance during this audit.

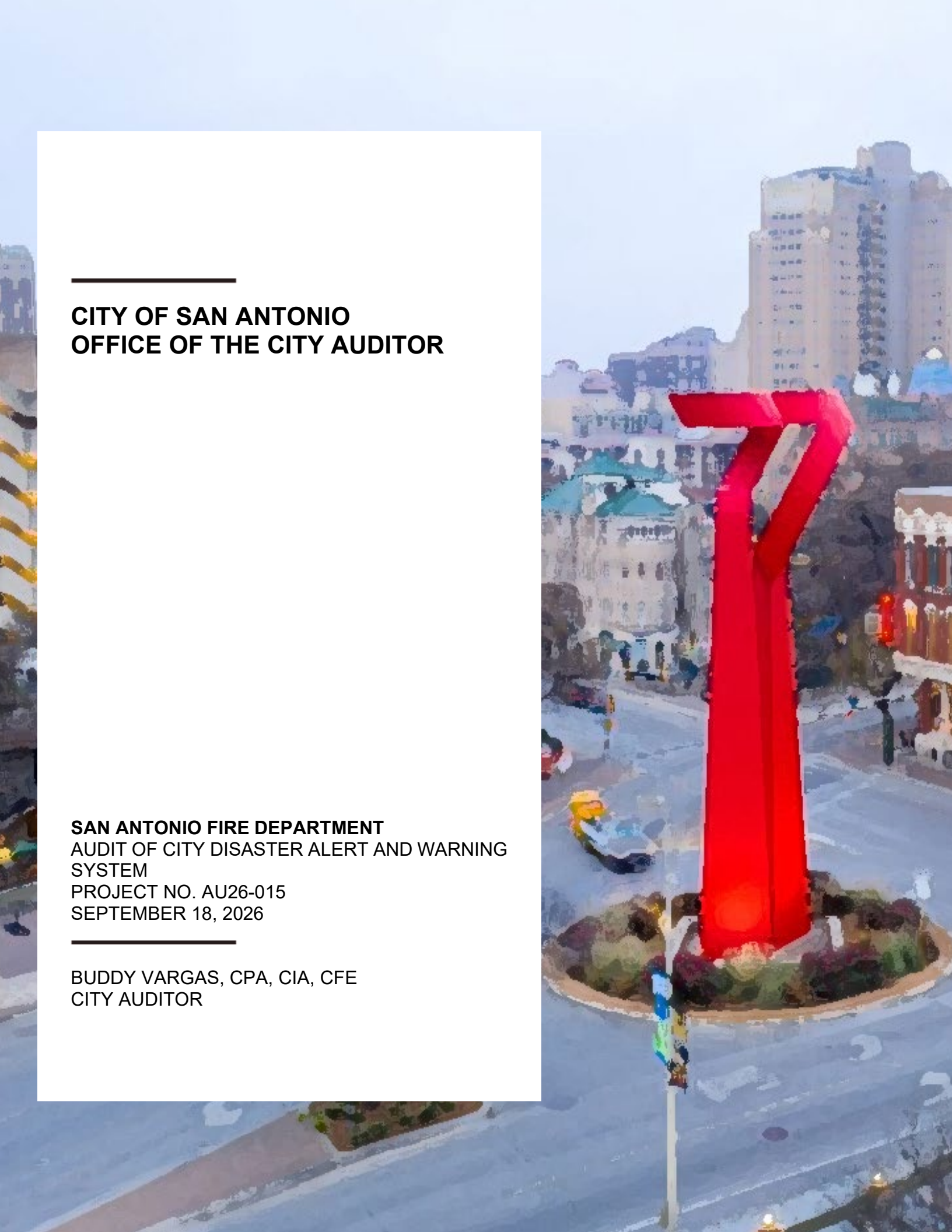
The Office of the City Auditor is available to discuss this report with you individually at your convenience.

Respectfully Submitted,

Buddy Vargas

Buddy Vargas, CPA, CIA, CFE
City Auditor
City of San Antonio

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CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR

SAN ANTONIO FIRE DEPARTMENT
AUDIT OF CITY DISASTER ALERT AND WARNING SYSTEM
PROJECT NO. AU26-015
SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

BUDDY VARGAS, CPA, CIA, CFE
CITY AUDITOR

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Executive Summary

As part of our annual Audit Plan approved by City Council, we conducted an audit of San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD), specifically the disaster warning system. The audit objective, conclusions, and recommendation follow:

Determine whether the City's disaster alert and warning system is effectively designed and is operated to ensure timely, reliable and accessible emergency notifications to the public in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices.

SAFD has effective policies and procedures in place to ensure the disaster alert and warning system is operating effectively. SAFD has sufficient procedures in place to ensure the department's standard operating procedures incorporate federal guidelines, approved personnel issue public alerts, and the public is educated on the alert and warning process. Additionally, the department has effective controls for conducting a post-incident review after an alert is issued, documenting areas of improvement and recommended corrective actions.

Furthermore, SAFD has sufficient procedures to ensure proficiency testing of the alert and warning system is performed and system users complete the appropriate training. Lastly, SAFD has effective controls in place to review invoices for accuracy.

However, we identified areas where controls could be improved over alert composition and delivery. Specifically, an alert was issued and did not contain an expiration time. In addition, the alert was not sent to a contracted vendor so it could be translated for individuals with sensory disabilities, including those who are deaf, blind, or hard of hearing.

We provided a recommendation to management to strengthen controls and resolve the identified issue. SAFD management agreed with the audit finding and has developed a positive action plan to address it. Management's verbatim response is in Appendix B on page 8.

Background

Emergency Management encompasses four different functions – Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. The City Disaster Alert and Warning System supports the Preparedness and Response functions. Through this system, SAFD issues alerts and warning messages to the general public to take protective actions during disaster and emergency situations. In addition, SAFD prepares for emergencies by facilitating activities such as planning, training, providing public education, and performing outreach of potential dangers and increased readiness to the community.

To facilitate emergency management, the City of San Antonio (COSA) created the San Antonio Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Their mission is to coordinate activities among the City departments responsible for continued operations during disasters, coordinate agreements for the most effective use of resources, communicate with State and Federal agencies, and educate citizens and municipal employees. To inform the public of imminent disaster, OEM uses the Regional Emergency Alert Network (REAN)/Everbridge system and the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to issue alerts and warning messages to the public. Examples of alerts and warning messages issued to the public include those for shelter in place, brush fire, hazardous materials release, and terrorism. In addition, the SAFD Communications Division serves as the Alert Originator for COSA. The Alert Originator is responsible for composing and activating alerts and warning messages in accordance with policies and incident needs. Finally, the Communication and Engagement Department along with the SAFD Public Information Officer are tasked with helping OEM extend the alerts and warning messages to a broader audience through various social media channels.

Bexar Metro 9-1-1 Network District provides COSA with access to REAN through the Everbridge software platform. REAN is owned and managed by Bexar Metro 9-1-1 and made available to COSA under a Mutual Aid Agreement, which governs all aspects of system access, use, and required standard operating procedures (SOPs). The Everbridge platform is designed to accelerate the delivery of time-sensitive alerts and warning messages to help prevent the loss of life and/or property. The use of the system is strictly limited to emergency alert and warning purposes. The Everbridge system supports multiple public alerting pathways, including landline/Voice over Internet Protocol calls, Wireless Emergency Alerts, and the Emergency Alert System.

Furthermore, COSA has contracts, overseen by OEM, with 3 vendors which assist with enhancing the disaster alerts or warnings to specific demographics. For example, the contract with Deaf Link Inc. ensures that any disaster alert or warning is translated into sign language for the deaf and/or blind. In addition, agreement with the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry provides grant funding to COSA. This allows COSA to market and advertise to senior citizens about signing up for this program to receive additional service during a disaster alert or warning.

Audit Scope and Methodology

The audit scope was October 2024 through January 2026. It included a review of the disaster alert and warning system process, compliance with laws and regulations, warning system proficiency testing and reliability, and contract invoices.

To gain an understanding of department operations, we interviewed the San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD), Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Communications and Engagement personnel. We performed walkthroughs of the process for issuing disaster alert and warning messages, compliance with federal regulations and best practices, roles of SAFD Public Information Officer and the Communications and Engagement department, and related expenditures. The OEM policies and procedures and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Memo of Agreement were our primary criteria for this audit.

As part of our testing procedures, we reviewed documentation to:

- Verify if OEM policies and procedures incorporated federal guidelines
- Determine if disaster alert and warnings were issued by authorized personnel, contained all the required elements, and were translated and delivered to blind and deaf citizens
- Confirm an After-Action Report was produced and included areas for improvement and corrective actions
- Determine if OEM was informing and educating the public about the disaster alert and warning system process
- Confirm OEM is conducting monthly proficiency tests to adequately test the Everbridge system and comply with FEMA's requirements
- Verify system users completed the appropriate training course as required by FEMA
- Determine if invoices were accurate and if SAFD received the required services

We relied on computer-processed data in the SAP system to validate expenditures. Our reliance was based on performing direct tests on the data rather than evaluating the system's general and application controls. We do not believe that the absence of testing general and application controls had an effect on the results of our audit.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Audit Results and Recommendations

SAFD has effective policies and procedures in place to ensure the disaster alert and warning system is operating effectively. The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is incorporating federal guidelines and best practices into their policies and procedures. We reviewed federal guidelines from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Incident Management System, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and others. We confirmed OEM's Local Warning Point and Alert Warning SOPs included these guidelines. We also reviewed OEM's Emergency Preparedness Plan and Citywide Hazard Mitigation Plan and verified both aligned with their SOPs.

Additionally, disaster alerts and warnings are issued by appropriate SAFD personnel. We inspected the two alerts issued from October 2024 through March 2026 and confirmed both alerts were issued by Local Warning Point Lieutenants as required by the SOPs. Furthermore, SAFD is sufficiently conducting a post-incident review after alerts are sent. We reviewed the After-Action Report prepared for the Large Brush Fire alert sent in March 2025 and determined the After-Action Report adequately documented areas for improvement and corrective actions recommended. Also, OEM is presenting and educating the public about the disaster alert and warning process. We reviewed visual aids and materials used in presentations conducted by OEM during FY 2025 and 2026. We confirmed OEM presented educational disaster alert and warning system information to the public on 22 occasions at various locations.

Moreover, the Everbridge system is effectively tested, and users of the system are adequately trained. We analyzed supporting documentation for proficiency testing performed by OEM from August 2025 to January 2026. Although FEMA requires testing to occur monthly, we verified OEM performed 21 proficiency tests during this six-month period. We also reviewed training certificates for the 6 system users authorized to send alerts and determined all 6 users completed the "IPAWS for Alert Originators" training course as required by FEMA.

Finally, invoices from third-party vendors are effectively reviewed, and contractual services are adequately monitored to verify delivery. We tested 15 invoices related to the Deaf Link contract totaling $170,631, 25 invoices related to the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry outreach and marketing program totaling $65,591, and one invoice related to the Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council agreement for $30,000. We verified all 41 invoices were accurate, properly supported, and included relevant contractual services.

However, we identified areas where controls could be improved over disaster alert and warning messaging sent to the public.

A. Alert Composition and Delivery

Disaster alert and warning messages are not properly composed within the appropriate guidelines and are not sent in the appropriate format to all affected citizens. We reviewed the two alerts issued by SAFD from October 2024 through March 2026. While the alerts included the description, location, and source of the hazard, we determined one alert did not include the

expiration time. If the timing of the emergency is not known, SAFD has the option to include the expiration time as "until further notice". In addition, we determined the same alert was not issued through the Accessible Hazard Alert System (AHAS), which formats alerts for individuals with sensory disabilities, including those who are deaf, blind, and hard of hearing.

Per the department's SOP, all alerts issued must include the following core elements: source, hazard, location, protective action to take, and expiration time. Additionally, the AHAS is automatically activated when an emergency alert and/or warning is issued.

The department is not following the existing controls for verifying the alerts issued include all the core elements and for verifying AHAS messages are issued alongside public alerts. A lack of executing these controls may result in ineffective alerts being issued and may negatively impact the safety of citizens.

Recommendation

The Fire Chief ensure the existing controls for verifying the alerts issued include all the core elements and verifying AHAS messages are issued with public alerts are executed as intended.

Appendix A – Staff Acknowledgement

Michael Gutierrez, CFE, Audit Manager
Danny Zuniga, CPA, CIA, Auditor in Charge
Rudy Carrasco, Auditor

Appendix B – Management Response

OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR

August 4, 2026

Buddy Vargas, CPA, CIA, CFE
City Auditor
San Antonio, Texas

RE: Management's Corrective Action Plan for Audit of San Antonio Fire Department City Disaster Alert and Warning System

The San Antonio Fire Department has reviewed the audit report and has developed the Corrective Action Plan below corresponding to the report recommendation.

Recommendation					
#	Description	Audit Report Page	Accept, Decline	Responsible Person's Name/Title	Completion Date
A	**Alert Composition and Delivery** The Fire Chief ensure the existing controls for verifying the alerts issued include all the core elements and verifying AHAS messages are issued with public alerts are executed as intended.	6	Accept	Brian O'Neill, Deputy Fire Chief Emergency Management Coordinator	August 2026 (Completed)
	Action plan: SAFD has updated all Everbridge incident templates to ensure every alert and warning message is composed with the required core elements, source, hazard, location, protective action, and expiration time, built into the template itself, removing reliance on the originator to manually populate each field at the time of activation. The AHAS notification group, including Deaf Link, has also been embedded directly within each incident template so that it is automatically included whenever an alert or warning is issued, ensuring accessible formatting is triggered without a separate manual step. This corrective action has been completed.				

We are committed to addressing the recommendation in the audit report and the plan of action presented above.

Sincerely,

Valerie Frausto
Fire Chief
San Antonio Fire Department

9-2-2026
Date

María Villagómez
Deputy City Manager
City Manager's Office

9-3-2026
Date