

The Government buys *alertas sísmicas* [early warning system], but they disappear or stay stored in warehouses

In Oaxaca only, the most affected state by September 7th earthquake, there are 3,400 *alertas* stored in state's warehouses; while in Mexico City other 7,000 were disappeared.

Oaxaca –the most affected state by the September 7th earthquake- has 6 thousand early warning radios since 2012, which distribution would have warned the population 30 seconds in advance of the upcoming earthquake.

Nonetheless, according to Oaxaca's *Coordinación Estatal de Protección Civil* [Civil Protection Coordination], 60% of those radios were never distributed and they have been stored in warehouses for more than five years.

As if this was not enough, the other 2,546 devices were only distributed in the state's central valley *municipios* [counties]. Because of this, Juchitán –with the highest rate of victims by the September 7th earthquake- had no warning.

As part of the early warning system, Oaxaca also acquired 13 long-range speakers to spread earthquakes warnings, but those, as the radios, were only installed in the state's capital.

Besides all this, at the end of August, 2017, NVI Noticias let the people know that the early warning system was not working in Oaxaca since last January, due the state government debts with the provider.

Since July, 2010 to July, 2011, the federal government and the Mexico City government spent jointly 255 million pesos to modernize the *Sistema de Alerta Sísmica Mexicano* [Mexican Early Warning System], which included radios that were never distributed in Oaxaca.

At least three more states are in the same situation: according to official information, in Mexico City 4,135 devices disappeared and 3,297 are still in warehouses; in Michoacán the final destination of 200 assigned devices is unknown, and in Guerrero there are other 2,200 devices disappeared.

The Director of the *Coodinación Nacional de Prevención de Desastres* (Cenapred. Disasters Prevention National Coordination), Carlos Valdés González, recognized that what has been done with these devices is a “calamity.”

Anomalies in the distribution

The federal government and Mexico City government spent 255 million pesos modernizing the *Sistema de Alerta Sísmica Mexicano* (SAS, created after 1985 earthquakes), which demanded renewing and amplifying the accelerographs[?] network in the Pacific coast (these devices detect the earthquakes), and distributing 88,000 radios or *alertas sísmicas* among the population. This was supposed to happen in 2010 and 2011.

These 88,000 radios should have been installed in schools, hospitals, government buildings, public spaces and residential areas, not only in the country's capital, but also in other threatened entities.

Seven years later, the devices can be bought even in Mercado Libre [\[an online platform similar to Craigslist\]](#), under the label of: "Acquired with FONDEN Trust to Mexican Seismic Network, second phase."

As official records gathered by *Animal Político* show, from the 88,000 devices acquired by the Mexican authorities to modernize SAS, at least 12,760 have disappeared (that equals 14% from the total), while 10,506 (12%) were never used and had been stored in different warehouses.

The same official records show despite 76% of the radios were installed, this was done with no previous distribution plan. Thus, they are mainly in four urban hubs (Mexico City, Oaxaca City, Acapulco and Chilpancingo), with no security to other localities also in risk.

The lack of an installation plan made that in Mexico City, where the majority of those 88,000 radios were installed, most of the devices have been robbed or they are wrongly installed.

An example of this are the government buildings with 48 devices where only one is required. This means that at least 10,000 buildings have an *alerta*, when only in Cuauhtémoc *delegación* [\[county?\]](#) there are more than 52 buildings "exposed" to earthquake hazards.

On the other hand, in other parts of Mexico also in seismic risk they did not receive one device.

Other states also affected by September 7th earthquake and not considered in the *alertas sísmicas* distribution were Chiapas (earthquake's epicenter), Hidalgo, Morelos, Estado de México, Puebla, Tabasco, Tlaxcala y Veracruz.

Negligent distribution: CDMX [\[Mexico City\]](#)

When Mexican authorities acquired 88,000 radios they did not know where to collocate them, therefore, they did not know if those devices covered or exceeded the country's needs either.

Still, the purchase was realized from two suppliers under three contracts *por adjudicación directa* [\[this type of purchasing is when the government decides the supplier directly because its product is at the best price and quality, or because is the only supplier\]](#): the "nonprofit" association Centro de Instrumentación y Registro Sísmico (CIRES), and the company MDreieck SA de CV.

In July, 2010, Mexico City's government –under Marcelo Ebrard administration–, hired CIRES to modernize the whole SAS, which included accelerometers network renewal, and "physical identification of buildings, schools, hospitals and vital installations as potential receivers of the early warnings." CIRES would have done this job giving priority to users "according their characteristics, and vulnerability."

Nonetheless, when *Animal Político* requested Mexico City's government the "list of potential users" to receive the devices supposedly created by CIRES in 2010, the *Instituto para la Seguridad de las Construcciones en la Ciudad de México* [\[Mexico City's Institute for Safety Constructions\]](#) informed they do not have records of that list ever been done.

With not knowing where these devices would be located, in November, 2010, Mexico City's government bought from MDreieck 50,000 seismic warning radios Sarmex.

As Mexico City's dependencies official records show, the lack of a distribution plan in Mexico City led to some radios disappearing (even before being installed), and the storage of some others in warehouses.

For instance, 2,492 radios destined to elementary educational institutions in Mexico City disappeared, as the City's government officially has recognized.

Same thing happened with 955 warning radios delivered to Miguel Hidalgo *delegación* [county?]. These radios disappeared even with their donation record, as *delegación's* authorities have declared.

Other *delegaciones* where all the radios disappeared are Gustavo A. Madero and Azcapotzalco.

Also, there are some institutions that still have stored the majority of the received radios, as the *Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* in Mexico City (DIF-CDMX), which only installed 363 out of 400 devices. The other 37 devices are stored since six years ago because "the buildings under the administration of this Ministry have already the devices needed."

In total, out of the 50,000 first acquired devices bought in 2010 by Mexico City government, 4,135 are disappeared and 3,297 are still in warehouses.

In January 2016, the radial early warning system was reinforced, not with additional receptor devices but with the diffusion of the seismic warning from the speakers with police surveillance cameras distributed in Mexico City streets.

Distrubution *a lo bruto* [foolishly]: federal government

In July, 2011, the federal government (under President Felipe Calderón administration), bought 38,000 radios from CIRES, to distribute them in Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán, and –once again- in the country's capital.

The purchase agreement established that CIRES was only required to provide the devices to the federal government, while "the further distribution of them would be *Coordinación General de Protección Civil* duty, under its own criteria."

The result was the same: thousands of stolen or sub-used radios.

For instance, in Michoacán the authorities said they did not know the final destination of 200 seismic warning radios sent by the federal government in 2012, and they also assured that the "law does not require them" to have this information, despite the legislation says otherwise.

In Oaxaca, more than half of the radios were never distributed and those that did were installed, are located in the capital and its surroundings only, ignoring the rest of the population.

Because of their technology, the warning time these radios offer is directly related to the distance between their location and the earthquake epicenter.

In other words, the less distance among the warning radio and the earthquake epicenter the less time for the early warning.

Therefore, the radios installed in central valley in Oaxaca are useful for distant earthquakes only, and they lose their effectiveness for those originated within the central valley itself.

For instance, when Oaxaca's capital is an earthquake epicenter, the distributed radios in this city sound at the same time when the earthquake is perceptible, and even some seconds later.

The same situation occurs in Guerrero, where 3,000 radios were delivered. According to Oaxaca's *Secretaría de Protección Civil* information, in February, 2017, radios were delivered to 12 *municipios* in the state (out of a total of 81 *municipios*).

Animal Político asked for information to the 12 *municipios* where the seismic warning devices were installed, but only two of them answered: Coyuca de Benítez and Acapulco, which received 321 radios combined.

Acapulco is the only coastal location in the country where seismic warning radios were installed (298 devices), which last September 7th opportunely warned about the earthquake and let the people to go out of the buildings.

The rest of 10 *municipios* in Guerrero that did receive 2,220 devices, ignore their final destination or they simply did not answer.

In addition to this, the *Secretaría de Protección Civil* in Guerrero informed that it has storage 133 radios in its warehouses since five years ago. The records do not show what happened with other 302 devices that disappeared during the donation process by the federal government to the local authorities or public institutions.

Cenapred: the table's leg

To know the criteria followed by the federal government in order to define which states should have received the 38,000 acquired radios, *Animal Político* requested information to the *Coordinación Nacional de Prevención de Desastres* (Cenapred).

In an interview, its Director Carlos Valdés González recalled that the purchasing of 38,000 radios, which he described as a "barbarity", was realized by the "aforementioned (federal) authorities."

Official records show that 36,000 radios were distributed during the last three months of Calderón administration; and the last 2,000 devices were distributed by Peña Nieto administration in 2013 and 2014.

"How (the states that should receive the devices) were selected, I do not know –the public servant assured-, but they were given to the affected states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán; radios were given to Mexico City government; and also to federal government buildings, giving priority to schools."

In the Cenapred, its Director said, "we would not be able to install that number of equipment in 38,000 different locations. So, this is what we did: seismic warning radios were given, through

agreements, to many institutions, and what those agreements established was that said institutions must let us know where the devices were installed, and provide them maintenance.”

Nonetheless, he said, “every year we requested those institutions the information related to where the radios were located, their geographic coordinates, and the places where they were installed, but we got tired of sending those requests (because) some institutions openly replied ‘I do not know where they are.’”

The Cenapred General Director highlighted “is not in our hands to audit (those institutions) or telling them to give the radios back because they did not give us the information (regarding radios’ final destination).”

At the end, he concludes, the distribution and use of that technology that can “save lives”, ended in a good faith act.

“That technology –the public servant insisted- was given in the best way, and everyone is responsible (of its final destination). The institutions that received them should have taken the warning radios, installed them, and keep them functioning.”

“We complied with our obligation to deliver the radios –Cenapred’s Director concluded.- But it is like the yellow pages: when I got home, my Aunt used it as a table’s leg, and the day we needed it, it was useless.”

Mercado Libre

In June, 2016, the selling website MercadoLibre.com offered a “new item” on sale: a set of “warning” radios that reproduce the official sound of the SAS. The price was 3,000 pesos per unit.

These radios guarantee could not been better: Government Ministry and *Coordinación Nacional de Protección Civil* logos.

Three days later, this offering had already sold three devices.

“This is the fourth,” says I., a young man in his early 20s, while he shows the item acquired through Mercado Libre: a blue carton box with a seismic warning image printed next to the label logo “Sarmex.”

Inside the box was the device next to a plug.

-And how does it work? –I. is asked.

-It’s good –the young man replies, and he shows the sticker adhered to the device, in which is signaled that the item was acquired by the federal government with FONDEN trust funding (Fund for the Alleviation of Natural Disasters).

For his own safety, I. goes accompanied by other young man as himself, but much taller, 1.90 meters height, and maybe 120 kilos weight.

After the payment and a handshake, both men walk away. The purchase was realized in the Santa Anita station platform [subway], in Iztapalapa *delegación*.

Because of the series number of this device, *Animal Político* was able to confirm that it was acquired by the federal government in 2011, and then it was donated, with the rest of 7,000 radios, to Mexico City government, which also distributed them to local entities.

According to official records, Mexico City's *Secretaría de Protección Civil* received 700 of those seismic warning receptors, which until today are stored in its central warehouse. From that warehouse the radio that was uploaded and sold in Mercado Libre in 2016, was stolen.

Some days after the purchase in Santa Anita station, I. phone called.

“Tell your neighbors. Tell them I have more radios, and if they purchase some of them, I can make them a discount.”

That same day, the stolen seismic warning radios were uploaded to Mercado Libre at a price of 4,000 pesos.

*This investigation was realized from June, 2016 to September 2017. 1,280 information requests were formulated to the federal government and local governments of Mexico City, Estado de México, Michoacán, Guerrero and Oaxaca under the Ley General de Transparencia [[Mexico's Freedom of Information Act](#)]