Morning Mix

Hawaii missile mess: That was no ‘wrong button.’ Take a look.

By Fred Barbash  January 16 at 5:40 AM

Pushing the “wrong button” was the explanation provided in an official timeline for that false warning that scared the devil out of people in Hawaii on Saturday morning alerting them to an incoming ballistic missile that never was. “The wrong button was pushed,” declared Vern Miyagi, head of the state’s emergency management agency.

But as The Washington Post’s Amy Wang reported, the errant employee actually was working with a drop-down menu on a computer program, from which the official chose the wrong item.

On Monday, state officials released an image of that menu, provided to The Post by Hawaii News Now, and it shed some light on why it might be confusing.

The menu, which triggers alerts, contains a jumble of options, ranging from Amber alerts to Tsunami warnings to road closures. Some of them, such as “High Surf Warning North Shores,” are in plain English.

Others, including the one for a missile attack, “PACOM (CDW)-STATE ONLY,” use shorthand initials. (PACOM refers to the United States Pacific Command based in Hawaii.)

And the menu contained no ballistic missile defense false alarm option — which has now been added at the top of the image, marked up by officials for explanatory purposes.

Not until 38 minutes after the warning went out did the state issue a correction. Various officials and news organizations beat the state to the “false alarm” message using Twitter and other social media.

“I wish I could say there was a simple reason for why it took so long to get the correction to the false alert out,” Hawaii Gov. David Ige (D) said in an unusual broadcast address to the state Monday evening.

Meanwhile, thousands of residents of Hawaii and tourists freaked out.
“Children going down manholes, stores closing their doors to those seeking shelter and cars driving at high speeds cannot happen again,” Ige said.

Ige, in his speech, deplored the fact that employees of the emergency management agency were getting death threats since the events of Saturday. “I will not stand for scapegoating management personnel when a number of unfortunate errors cause this event,” he said.

Ige also announced that he was appointing Brig. Gen. Kenneth S. Hara, who is Deputy Adjutant General in Hawaii, to oversee “a comprehensive review of the state’s emergency management enterprise.”

Meanwhile, Reuters reported that Japanese broadcaster NHK issued a false alarm about a North Korean missile launch Tuesday but corrected the error within minutes.