

# RFC 220 WIP: Alerts unification

Editor: alicja@sourcegraph.com

Status: Review

Requested reviewers (please review by EOD YYYY-MM-DD): Quinn K., Christina Forney,

Approvals: Christina, Rijnard van Tonder, Rob Rhyne

## Background

Alerts are used in Sourcegraph to communicate important information to our users. We use different colors to differentiate between different types of messages. Alerts can contain text, icons, links, and buttons. We use inline one-line and multi-line alerts as well as floating ones.

Inline alerts:

### Alerts

Provide contextual feedback messages for typical user actions with the handful of available and flexible alert messages.

A simple primary alert — check it out! It can also contain **links like this**.

A simple secondary alert — check it out! It can also contain **links like this**.

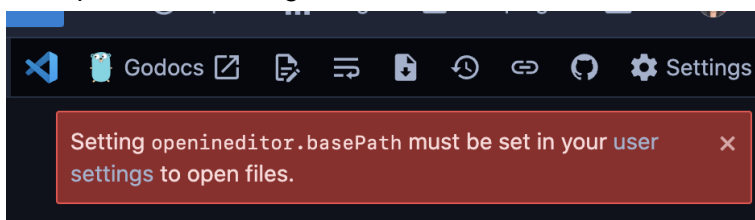
A simple success alert — check it out! It can also contain **links like this**.

A simple danger alert — check it out! It can also contain **links like this**.

A simple warning alert — check it out! It can also contain **links like this**.

A simple info alert — check it out! It can also contain **links like this**.

Example of the floating contextual alert:



# Problem

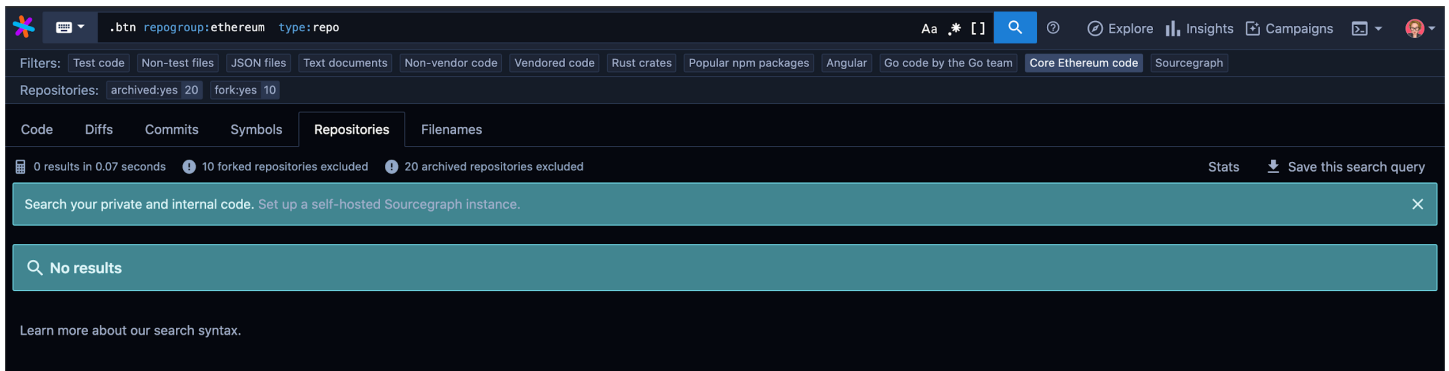
Currently, we **over-use** the alerts in many cases, especially the teal ‘info’ alert. Alerts **readability** could also be improved - now text can be full width of the alert. It makes the message difficult to read. According to accessibility standards, text column width shouldn’t exceed 700px.

It is important to solve this problem now as:

- Using inconsistent communication patterns may be confusing/annoying for the users
- Correctly used alerts become less meaningful
- Using alerts too often makes some pages overcrowded
- The longer we continue to use incorrect patterns, the more work it takes to eventually address all the issues

👍👎 [See bad and good usage comparison in Figma](#)

## 1. Using alerts as empty states for ‘no search results’

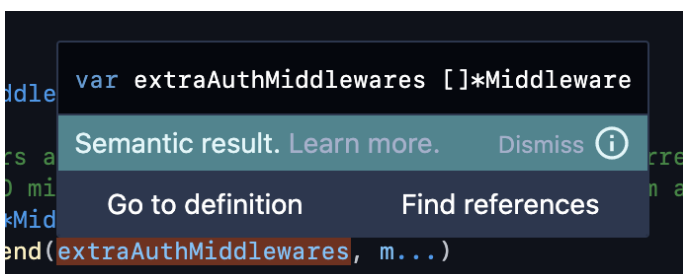


## 2. Using alerts as instructions or helper text

Add a changeset to get started.

(Example from the ‘create new campaign’ flow)

## 3. Making information message in the alert visually more important than the content itself



# Proposal

---

1. **Improve readability by adding max-width of the text of 696px.** 700px is a generally used standard, 696px is a value adjusted to our 8px grid.
  - a. [Another proposition](#) to solve this problem is to limit the number of characters to 66 per line.
  - b. The width of the background of the alert doesn't change because of this adjustment. It still can be full width.
2. **Set guidelines on how to use alert vs empty states vs. informative texts**
  - a. Add guidelines to Storybook and Figma, in the future - to the design system documentation.

## Proposed guidelines:

Alerts provide contextual messages about **system status** and **user actions**.

### Behavior:

- Alert should never block users from interacting with other elements on the page.
- In some cases, user should be able to dismiss the alert, especially the 'info' alert
- Error alerts should be dismissed only after solving the issue

### Structure:

- Alerts can be one line or multi-line
- One line alert can contain text, link, icon, and button
- Multi-line alert can also use a header
- Text column width shouldn't exceed 696px
- Inline alerts should have a full width background
- Contextual floating alerts shouldn't be wider than 432px

### Usage:

- Returning feedback as the result of a user action within a page (ex. errors in the forms)
- Informing about the status of the system that user may or may not respond to (ex. updates, timeout, system overload)
- Additional important information about the page content (ex. beta version message, security information)
- Informing about the feature or configuration change that can significantly improve the user flow (ex. setting up a self-hosted instance, installing the browser extension). Those alerts need to be contextual and dismissable.

### Placement:

- Full-width alert, at the very top of the screen - if it is a general system information (ex. update)
- Inline full-width alert - in the context of the page - if the alert applies to the specific content of the section
- Contextual floating alert - attached to the trigger (ex. above/below the button)

Alternative solutions:

- If user needs to address the issue before proceeding, consider using a popup
- For empty states and 'no search results' states, use informative text and/or graphics
- For instructions about the task, next steps, or constraints, use the contextual help text

---

### 3. Improve the existing pages

- a. Search empty states
- b. Campaigns helper text  
Code intelligence tooltips



[See the design improvements in Figma](#)

# Definition of success

Success in this project will be mainly indicated by:

- Not getting user feedback about confusing alerts during the usability testing and from other feedback sources
- Our team is able to follow the alert guidelines and sees this proposed solution as satisfying for the needs of all the projects and use cases