FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

FACT SHEET

THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM (EAS)

"This is a test of the Emergency Alert System -- this is only a test...."

This is the new test script that you will occasionally hear on your favorite broadcast station or your local cable system. We say that the test script may only be heard occasionally because the new EAS weekly test does not require a test script. Instead the new weekly test consists of an eight-second digital data signal. The signal contains the information necessary to test the EAS. There is also a monthly test that has a test script. The monthly test script is developed locally and usually contains information that is relevant to the local area.

Since **January 1, 1997**, all AM, FM and TV broadcast stations have been using the above test procedures. Also, since **December 31, 1998**, cable systems that have 10,000 or more subscribers are part of the EAS. They are doing the above tests and have the capability to transmit emergency messages on all of their video channels.

There are other important changes as well. The EAS uses digital technology to distribute messages. This allows for a lot of improvements in providing emergency information to the public. The new system provides state and local officials with a new method to quickly send out important local emergency information targeted to a specific area. The information can be sent out through a broadcast station and cable system even if those facilities are unattended. Also, the EAS digital signal is the same signal that the National Weather Service (NWS) uses on NOAA Weather Radio (NWR). This allows NWR signals to be decoded by the EAS equipment at broadcast stations and cable systems. Broadcasters and cable operators can then retransmit NWS weather warning messages almost immediately to their audiences.

Also, specially equipped consumer products, such as televisions, radios, pagers and other devices, can decode EAS messages. The consumer can program these products to "turn themselves on" for the messages they want to receive.

WHY HAVE AN EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM?

The EAS is designed to provide the President with a means to address the American people in the event of a national emergency. Through the EAS, the President would have access to thousands of broadcast stations, cable systems and participating satellite programmers to transmit a message to the public. The EAS and its predecessors, CONELRAD and the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS), have never been activated for this purpose. But beginning in 1963, the President permitted state and local level emergency information to be transmitted using the EBS.

WHAT DOES THE NEW EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM MEAN FOR YOU?

- **Automatic Operation.** The EAS digital system architecture allows broadcast stations, cable systems, participating satellite companies, and other services to send and receive emergency information quickly and automatically even if those facilities are unattended.
- **Redundancy.** The EAS requires monitoring of at least two independent sources for emergency information. This insures that emergency information is received and delivered to viewers and listeners.
- **Less Intrusive.** EAS tests are shorter and less obtrusive to viewers and listeners. Therefore, when people do hear or see the EAS messages, they will take them more seriously.
- **Second Language.** Do you or someone you know watch Spanish-language programming? EAS digital messages can be automatically converted into any language used by the broadcast station or cable system.

WHO MAKES THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM WORK?

The FCC designed the new EAS, working in a cooperative arrangement with the broadcast, cable, emergency management, alerting equipment industry, the National Weather Service and the Federal Emergency Management Administration.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EACH OF THESE AGENCIES?

FCC. The FCC provides information to broadcasters, cable system operators, and other participants in the EAS regarding the requirements of this emergency system. Additionally, the FCC will ensure that EAS state and local plans developed by industry conform to the FCC EAS rules and regulations and enhance the national level EAS structure.

NWS. NWS provides emergency weather information used to alert the public of dangerous conditions. Over seventy percent of all EAS and EBS activations were a result of natural disasters and were weather related. Linking NOAA Weather Radio digital signaling with the EAS digital signaling will help NWS save lives by reaching more people with timely, site-specific weather warnings.

FEMA. FEMA provides direction for state and local emergency planning officials to plan and implement their roles in the EAS.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

Consumers, broadcasters, organizations, or other service providers who want to understand the new EAS can contact:

FCC. The FCC provides a toll-free number that provides information on a wide variety of subjects, including the EAS. The number is 1-888-CALL FCC [1-888-225-5322]. The toll-free TTY number is 1-888-TELL FCC [1-888-835-5322].

NWS. Contact Herbert White (301) 713-0090 extension 146.

FEMA. Contact Don Jacks (202) 646 3985

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