

## **To all Washington State Broadcasters, Cable Systems and other EAS Participants**

:

The recent signing of an Executive Order by the President set into motion some sizable changes in the EAS. Much of this was forecast by the FCC's comments in the most recent FNRPM. Even though the FCC has not issued a rule-making much is being reported in the trades as to what this means, nationally. The good news is that much of what was contained in SBE's most recent comments appears to have been well received...To the point of seeing many of our comments trickling out of Federal agencies. Its quite gratifying to know that the 'Feds' are indeed listening.

Our State EAS Committee, the SECC, learned at its meeting on July 12th that big changes are in store for the 10 year old EAS and will have a direct impact in how things work here in our state. Let me take a few moments to discuss some of the details.

One thing is very clear, EAS is going digital and textual. The reason for this is simple...The addition of a number of text enabled devices are being added to the EAS will require it. The days of the scratchy voice messages are numbered. The foundation for the system is going to be what is known as CAP or the Common Alerting Protocol. (Another example of where SBE's strong recommendations are being implemented)

For the past several years the folks at PBS have been testing an emergency message distribution system that utilizes not only the PBS Satellite system but a portion of the bit-stream of local PBS stations. The pilot system at WETA has proved to be quite viable and will apparently be used for distribution of National EAS Messages in the future. The future of the nations PEP stations (in our case, KIRO) and how this will all fit together will become clear as we move forward.

Here in our state...Plans are being made to augment the State Relay Network (SRN) with an IP based system that will enable State as well as local governments to initiate EAS messages. All of this will be text based. This means that the messages that you receive will be composed on a computer, with appropriate safeguards, thereby eliminating the problematic low quality audio and significantly reducing the error plagued coding issues.

NWR facilities will be in the loop also by receiving the same IP based emergency message and incorporating it into their 162 Mhz systems throughout the state via their recently announced information processing initiatives.

So where does this put the average Radio or TV station in this process? For TV stations and perhaps some news oriented Radio stations, they will likely wish to connect to the system ahead of the main distributors (LP's and NWR) and get the CAP message directly. This will enable these facilities to take advantage of the CAP text message providing a seamless input for their Chyron – and more! This will put an end to the broadcasting of crude and occasionally inaccurate information contained in the EAS Header Codes.

EAS will continue to provide a voice message for TV Audio as well as Radio stations. Whereas the text message will be 'read' by text readers, this means that the text and voice messages will be identical. These text readers will be located, in addition to

NWR facilities, at select Local Primary facilities around the state. For stations having a connection to the CAP network, a text reader can be simply connected to a monitor input on their ENDEC.

For you technically inclined – this system is called the FEMA DEAS system – the DEAS system will originate and transmit CAP messages, with associated audio, plus video and file attachments, (graphics, maps, pdfs, etc...) In other words, the CAP message will be accompanied by audio and much more. A company call SpectraRep is doing the systems development and integration, and the system has been operating in pilot mode for 18 months, and now includes 17states. KCTS, the Channel 9 PBS affiliate in Seattle, has been participating in the development of this new system.

I want you to all know that the foul-ups with EAS have not gone un-noticed at any level...but like all systems or programs that involve government entities....the wheels of progress often move at glacial speed.

I hope by now that you too are excited at the news of these enhancements to our public warning system. Obviously the SECC and LECC's are going to have their work cut out for them. It may well be that state and local EAS plans will have to be modified to incorporate these changes. For those that have been serving on these committee's, some exciting work lies ahead. This also represents a great opportunity to get involved. Let me know if you are at all interested. Remember that EAS is – NOT – an engineering function! The only qualification needed is a desire to create an effective means of alerting the public. Our ultimate goal – The saving of lives....if you ask me... a noble chore.

In the mean time - we have work to do to make sure that our existing EAS system remains viable and ready to go-to-work. There are some specific areas that need attention –

### **RECENT TESTING –**

As you all know the bulk of the recent RMT testing has been coming from the State EMD. The primary reason for this change was to permit the testing and evaluation of some of the equipment that will become part of the enhanced system. We are now back to the testing schedule that's called out for in the State Plan, Tab 11, which you can also find on the Washington State Association of Broadcasters web site at [www.wsab.org](http://www.wsab.org) under the Emergency Alert System navigation bar.

### **LOCAL AREA TESTING –**

Once again local areas will be responsible for the transmission of RMT's per the test schedule. In the past we have had a number of 'issues' that could have been prevented. I call upon all of the local area (LECC) Chairs to contact the government entity that will be initiating your areas test – **ahead of time** - to help insure that all is well. Each of these folks should be asked to transmit a DMO, with an audio message, that can be monitored to insure that their equipment is operating properly, levels are correct, audio is clear etc etc. Frankly, there is no excuse for not going the 'extra-mile' to help insure that all goes well.

## **POOR AUDIO QUALITY –**

Granted our present – analog – voice message system has had some rough spots...but research has determined that this need not be the case. I call on each of the LECC's in our state to set up a time to monitor the audio quality from all of their local message sources to help insure that audio quality and levels are up to par. There is no reason why we should have continued problems. Until such time as we roll out the new system we will have to live with what we have...and we – do not – have to live with poor quality. To be perfectly frank, the major reasons we have been having these issues are –

- > Poor or lack of training
- > Inferior equipment installation
- > Poor or lack of equipment maintenance
- > Lack of attention to detail
- > Lack of periodic or prior to RMT testing of equipment.
- > Poor attitudes or lack of willingness to get it right

The bottom line – It pretty clear that a very high percentage of these problems could and can be prevented.

## **RECEIVING A MESSAGE WITH POOR QUALITY –**

- 1 > Do not put it on the air.
- 2 > Find out where you got the poor quality audio (from what monitored source)
- 3 > Immediately post this information on the State EAS Remailer so that corrective action can be taken.

## **PROGRAMMING OF DECODERS –**

It is the responsibility of each Radio and TV station and Cable provider to program their own decoder. Granted these devices are a bit more complicated than some would like...perhaps to the degree that someone from your IT department should be involved to insure that the unit is programmed correctly.

We have recently discovered that some EAS units are – not- programmed correctly that this is causing un-necessary problems....for example – Some units are programmed in such a way that they do not respond to certain messages being transmitted by certain government entities. It should not matter to a Broadcaster or Cable system – who – is initiating an EAS message. An Evacuation Immediate or EVI - is an EVI whether or not its transmitted by the National Weather Service or a Civil Authority or by an LP Station.

Please check the programming in your EAS unit to make –sure – that it will respond to emergency messages, regardless of who initiates or relays the message. All originator codes should be programmed in your unit. If you are not sure what these Event Codes mean, read through our newest addition to the Washington State EAS Plan, Tab-8, for a description of some of the more important ones. This Tab will be of great help in understanding the mission for EAS.

If you have ANY question as to proper programming of your EAS unit, contact Don Miller at WEMD [d.miller@emd.wa.gov](mailto:d.miller@emd.wa.gov).

## **LP's ABILITY TO INITIATE EAS MESSAGES –**

When the Washington State EAS Plan was crafted some 10 years ago it was determined that Broadcast Stations, that may well be operating un-attended, should not be initiating EAS messages. At the most recent SECC meeting this was discussed with the following major point made –

While its true that Broadcasters should not be the primary origination points for EAS messages, it may well be a good idea that some LP stations have that capability. The reason for this is to add redundancy to the system.

I am, therefore, asking all LP stations to contact me – directly- so that we might discuss your ability, should the need arise, to be a facility that could be contacted by a Government official for the purpose of initiating an emergency EAS message.

Note – If I don't hear from you, I will come looking for you.

Lets start this dialog via email – via the following address – [K7CR@blarg.net](mailto:K7CR@blarg.net)

## **PARTICIPATING IN THE PROCESS –**

In order that we might have a better EAS system and be able to move swiftly to implement the changes that are in the pipe with EAS....The time has come to get our house in order – Here are some – strong – recommendations aimed at improving our internal structure and communications.

> Every LECC should be meeting every 60 to 90 days This should be a face to face in person meeting whereby issues can be discussed, problems addressed etc. Having a routine, periodic meeting is significantly better than having one – when the need arises. This meeting should be moderated by the Local Area (LECC) chair.

> Every LECC Chair should be participating in the SECC meetings, either in person or via telephone and the conference bridge.

> Typically the LECC Chair has been a Broadcaster. However if no Broadcaster steps forward ..... I think you see where this is going.

> Remember that participation in these Committee's should never be restricted to Engineers. Unfortunately, many feel that EAS is a 'technical thing' and therefore participation should be left to Broadcast Engineers. I am here to tell you that our greatest need is for inspirational leaders who understand and believe in our mission. Many folks in a broadcast operation, general managers, operations people, news department personnel likely have applicable skills....Your job is to get them involved.

> If you are the chairman of an LECC or have been serving on Committee and have determined that you cannot perform these tasks, I want you to know that this is OK. What is most important to the success of EAS in the local areas is knowing that the LECC is active and on top of issues in their area. Please let the SECC know how your Committee is doing and how we can be of help.

> The SECC, our State Level EAS Committee, is where we bring a lot of this together. In order to make sure that we are operating effectively, it is – vital – that all LECC Chairs attend these meetings either in person or by dialing into a conference bridge that will enable your participation via telephone. The SECC meets approximately every 60 days.

## **COMMUNICATIONS and COOPERATION -**

It's vital that we communicate with each other. This is why we have a state-wide Remailer and periodic meetings. We simply must communicate with each other or our system is doomed to failure. EAS will remain a vital public warning system and it will only be as effective as to wish it to be, regardless of the new technologies that are being put into effect, It is still going to be up to us to make sure that the needs of our citizens are met and that things work smoothly and problems are addressed. The first place we need to concentrate our efforts is via communications. Lets vow to do a better job communicating with each other.

If you are not a subscriber to the Washington State EAS Remailer ([eas-wa@broadcast.net](mailto: eas-wa@broadcast.net)) please consider doing so. To avoid a steady stream of email, consider using the 'digest' version. If you are not sure as to how to do this, or have questions, contact Jim Tharp at KIRO in Seattle ([jtharp@entercom.com](mailto: jtharp@entercom.com)) or 206-726-7097 or 206-463-3380

## **AND FINALLY –**

A word of thanks for those that have been faithfully serving on the SECC and the various LECC's in our State. You have much to be proud of and much to look forward to!

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