



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

EAS Q&A

EAS 2010

By Clay Freinwald and Barry Mishkind

[December 2009] EAS is now over a dozen years old. With changes (including CAP) on the horizon, we thought it was time to bring back the EAS Q&A with Clay Freinwald. Perhaps one of the best-known EAS evangelists, Clay has worked long and hard with the local and state committees in Washington State, the FCC, the SBE EAS Committee (which he chaired for many years), and travelled all over the country to help other areas set up their programs. Clay continues to welcome your questions.

CAP AND NEW ENDECES

Barry: Clay, with all the "commotion" over CAP, where does EAS stand in the review process by FEMA and DHS? Are we close to the start of the "180-day clock?"

Clay: At last years' NAB, NAB/NASBA EAS Summit, and FEMA Working Group meetings, we all made it very clear that we do not want the Feds to roll out a half-baked next-generation EAS system. In recognition of this, FEMA has been proceeding very carefully. There have been some forward steps made, specifically in areas involving endecs etc. Much work needs to be done in the area of message distribution and security.

Barry: Probably the top EAS concern today at most stations is what is coming. Will they have to buy a new endec? When this will happen? What can you tell us?

Clay: I would say yes. My recommendation is that we look forward to the creation of a much more viable and robust public warning system taking advantage of changes in technology. My feeling is that, if we can roll out a new system that resolves much of the shortcomings of the existing system, the reluctance to buy something new will be reduced. This is one of the reasons why I have stumped so hard for the Feds to *get it right* and not create another half-baked system that again becomes a lightning rod for critical comments.

As to when to buy a new box, let me put it this way: It appears that some of the makers of new endecs are telling us that they will upgrade the equipment, as needed, to be compliant with those, yet to be published, FCC Rules. If your old endec dies, buy a new one *with the provision* that the maker will indeed upgrade it.

How much to budget? This is like asking for a price for a transmitter. It depends on what features you want. Some of the new endecs are likely to be considerably more feature rich than the stuff we have in service today. My best advice is to shop around and understand that there will be a number of units to choose from when the time comes.

FALLOUT FROM THE KWVE CASE

Barry: The Enforcement Bureau recently whacked KWVE-FM with a \$5,000 fine over a botched EAS test. The EB finally backed down, yet more than a few stations have begun to question their participation as LP stations. Is the EAS in danger of breaking down?

Clay: I would hope the KWVE case would be viewed as a wake-up call on a number of fronts. KWVE could be thought of as the canary in the mine - an indication that something (other than the bird) is wrong.

Barry: What would you tell LP stations that are considering resigning - or at least stop initiating RMTs?

Clay: Broadcasters that are LP stations should be taking a long look at whether or not they wish to continue in this role. However, it is important that we do not cripple the system.

First, it is my belief that broadcasters *should not be originating RMT's*. They are not the sources of EAS messages in the first place. Broadcaster initiated tests can only be partial tests of the system and partial testing of any system is poor practice.

The way I see it, all testing should *involve the entire system*. Emergency messages come from a government entity at some level - *and it is that entity that should be initiating tests*.

Unfortunately a great number of people assume a broadcaster should be doing this chore. The broadcasters' job is to distribute emergency/life-saving information to the public – not waste their time running partial tests or relaying information to other broadcasters.

This should be a wakeup call to revisit EAS Plans.

Barry: So you would suggest what changes for state and local plans regarding the RMT?

Clay: I would suggest what we do here in Washington State: have the government entities *initiate* the RMT *and distribute it to all broadcasters and cable systems*, who then can broadcast the message. This is a true end-to-end test. Furthermore, we “rotate the duty” between state and local governments, as well as NWR.

This is the way it has been done in Washington State since the beginning of EAS.

I submit that this does not require a change in FCC Rules, but rather a change in state and local EAS Plans. Washington State handles the matter this way now, and our EAS plan was approved, by the FCC, about 13 years ago.

Clay Freinwald continues to work with FEMA, DHS, the FCC PSHSB, and other groups working on the next generation of EAS gear and plans. Do you have a question? Please ask Clay at k7cr@blarg.net or BDR-Editor@theBDR.net

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