



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

EAS Q&A

Improving the RWT & RMT

By Clay Freinwald and Barry Mishkind

[February 2010] The EAS Weekly and Monthly tests have been going on for well over a decade. Yet, there is still confusion – especially when the emergency operations centers are involved - that lead to errors and false alerts. This time we take a look at the RWT and RMT, and possible ways to make them better tests of the EAS.

Barry: Clay, let's take a look at the Monthly and Weekly tests this time. There are a lot of folks who think they have outlived their original purpose. What do you think?

Clay: We have to test. The recent EAN (Presidential access) test conducted in Alaska continues to show there is a need to fix some problems but, more importantly, it shows why we need to test the entire EAS from end to end.

Barry: You make a good point. Without tests, we would never know if the system works – and it clearly will not have brought the President's message to everyone in Alaska, much less the whole 50 states, unless the problems identified are fixed ... and retested again.

Clay: Quite so. We need these tests so we can check each part of the system and increase the level of reliable performance.

Barry: OK. Let us come at this from another angle. It has been more than a dozen years since the current EAS boxes were mandated. Why is the system not reliable, and what can be done to make it so?

Clay: We need to make the test run from end to end, from the originating agency, which *should not be a broadcaster*, to the stations at the end of the system. Of course, there are hardware issues. But once a codec is properly installed, it becomes more of a human issue. Training only works so long as the trained people are running things. When new staffers come along, both at radio stations and EM centers, we have the potential for failure.

Barry: So, job #1 is train, train, train?

Clay: Yes, anyone who works with the EAS boxes should be trained and rechecked periodically, to make sure they know what to do. Also, I would recommend that broadcasters help their local EM centers, so they understand what happens on the air at stations when tests or alerts are not handled correctly.

Barry: That makes sense. Moving on, some have suggested that the Weekly tests are no longer of much value, especially since so many stations have moved control to their automation systems. Is the RWT still useful?

Clay: Yes, they probably could be eliminated - *after* an area stops using broadcast stations as a point of entry for EAS messages. My guess is that the Commission views the RWT as a test of the initiation capability of broadcast stations - which was not a bad idea, at first.

Barry: So what are your thoughts on how we could improve the testing?

Clay: Here is my recommendation:

In any area where broadcasters are now required (not all are) to initiate EAS messages and RMT's - and there is *no* broadcast-station-to-broadcast-station "daisy-chain" - then stations in that area may omit initiating RWT's.

However, I would still require broadcasters to monitor two sources of providing a redundant means of receiving EAS's, and those systems continue to have routine testing using the RWT.

Barry: How would you implement that?

Clay: Stations would still be required to receive and log the receipt of RWT's - the exception being that these tests would be distributed via background channels, aka, LRN's - not directly on the air. Any station inspection (as it is done now) would include checking that station's EAS Log to see that those tests are being received. Stations would still be obligated to find out why they did not receive a test and log that info, as they do now.

On the other hand, Monthly tests (RMT's) would continue to be broadcast on the air. These would be *end-to-end tests*, to make sure the primary input points can reach all stations. Some could be statewide, some should be national tests.

These changes would make the actual testing more meaningful and useful in preparing the EAS for use in emergencies.

After many years as Chairman of the SBE's EAS Committee, 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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