



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

EAS Q&A

Understanding the EAS LP's

By Clay Freinwald and Barry Mishkind

[December 2009] As we head into 2010, EAS is – depending upon with whom you speak – either undergoing changes or under attack. With the FCC Enforcement Bureau seeming to regard EAS as a revenue source, it is a good time to review station policies and procedures.

Barry: Clay, perhaps we should take a quick look at the Local Primary (LP) sources in the EAS chain, and what they are assigned to do. Then we can talk about how to improve distribution.

Clay: OK. First point: the LP (in most areas) has a couple of key functions:

- Initiating the Required Monthly Tests (RMT's).
- Operating as a relay service for the benefit of (other) broadcasters who either monitor the station directly or in-directly (via a daisy chain).

Barry: So this is the responsibility of the key radio stations in a given market?

Clay: No, not necessarily. It is important to understand that LP's do not have to be broadcast stations! In fact, I feel very strongly that they *should not* be broadcast stations! I propose that the time has come to learn from the most recent mistake and get broadcasters out of doing what should be a government function and concentrate on what we do best.

One reason for this is that if, in the future, LP's are going to have to distribute CAP messages, the payload involved in this endeavor will become extremely burdensome, to the point that broadcasters will likely “pull the plug” on being an LP.

To avoid this, it is much better to arrange now for a suitable relay system that will distribute EAS information from a source to multiple destinations. This is often called Point-Multi-Point distribution. The source point of such a relay system can be any number of agencies, from the National Weather Radio to State or Local Emergency Agencies.

It is time that broadcasters say no to being relay devices for government messages for the benefit others.

Barry: All right. So what you are saying is that the LP can be one of many sources – best *not* a broadcast station - depending upon the local and state plan.

Clay: Exactly. The radio stations and various agencies should get together and make whatever arrangement is best for the area. In fact, for many reasons, the entry point for EAS messages should not be a radio stations. Station should be only relay points in the alert chain.

The concept used here in Washington State is to use a VHF or UHF radio system (often an existing one) to fulfill the mission of the LP-1. We call these devices Local Relay Networks, or LRNs. In many cases, these systems have multiple inputs.

In Seattle, the LP-2 also is *not* a broadcast station, but instead is the NWR, which has been outfitted for multiple inputs just as is the LP-1 or the LRN.

Barry: Why would you want to have different entry points for EAS messages and tests?

Clay: First, the testing phase ensures that any agency that should be able to issue an EAS alert can do so. Additionally, this tests the entire system from end to end. To take this further, there are plans for a National Test in 2010, the first ever, to make sure the system will function if needed.

Barry: What is the procedure for moving the LP designation from a radio station to another agency?

Clay: There are a few steps, but it is not too difficult:

1. We start with the creation of Local Relay Networks (LRN's). These can be comprised of VHF or UHF radio channels or other means of Point-Multi-Point distribution.
2. Making sure that those sources of EAS messages have EAS Encoders that are connected to the distribution systems.
3. Make sure that all the broadcast and cable systems within that market (Local EAS Area) are connected to the LRN.
4. Re-write the EAS plan to make it official.
5. Submit the revised plan(s) to the FCC for their blessing.
6. Enjoy your greatly improved EAS System.

Barry: Well, that is pretty straightforward.

Clay: And, it solves a lot of problems.

Barry: So, it would seem. Next time, I think we should discuss the Monthly and Weekly tests – and what changes can be made to improve the system, both in terms of reliability and content.

Clay: That sounds like a good plan.

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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