EAS Update
Last Call for EAS Clock
First Call for New State Plans

By Richard Rudman

[May 2012] During the 2012 NAB Show, repre-senttatives from FCC and FEMA answered a few questions were answered regarding where things stand as we transition into the new world of CAP/EAS. A few more items are needed, but all SECCs and LECCs have some tools to start the move forward.

Looking back on the past few weeks of the EAS story leading up to June 30th and beyond, we can safely say we know more than we did about the roadmap to the CAP-EAS implementation deadline destination, but we definitely need to know more as we ride along that road.

TTS OR NO TTS

Prior to the NAB Convention we were all won-dering if the FCC would rescind their ban on EAS Text-To-Speech (TTS).

FEMA petitioned their federal partner, the FCC. A significant number of the EAS stakeholders agreed and supported FEMA's petition. And in the end, the FCC did the right thing. Voluntary use of TTS will be allowed.

BWWG HELPS WITH PLANS

At NAB, The Broadcast Warning Working Group (BWWG) arranged for a room courtesy of the NAB for a unique workshop targeted on a missing link in what the industry needed to know about changes to the EAS.

A group of twenty-five EAS subject experts that included state and local EAS Chairs, EAS equipment manufacturers, broadcasters, and a representative of FEMA met for two hours to start work on a sample state EAS plan that incorporated all we knew at that time about changes in Part 11, the EAS Rules.

That sample plan is now in its 3rd Version and is posted on the [EAS Forum](#) website.

Notification of its availability is available has been sent to state chairs, SBE, NAB, NASBA and other interested parties. This document is by necessity going to be a work in progress, principally because the FCC has not yet given us answers on what state and local plans should say about key EAS plan elements.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT PLANS

As of this writing, the FCC expects state plans to include not only a mapbook, but also "…. should include a data table, in computer readable form, clearly showing monitoring assignments and the specific primary and backup path for emergency action notification (EAN) messages that are formatted in the EAS Protocol (specified in §11.31), from the PEP to each station in the plan."

This seems to some to represent an unfunded twin cost – resources burden on the volunteer groups that sit on state and local EAS committees. More guidance is needed, and a request for this guidance has been made to the FCC by the BWWG.

ABOUT THAT NATIONAL EAS TEST

As the week progressed, attention turned to wondering when the report on the EAS live code test would be announced, and the Part 11 decisions we were told will be made based on that report will be announced.

We did learn that many stations (one estimate says 40%) did not file their required national test reports, and that there was no way for anyone to easily find out if their report was on file. Tom Beers, Chief of the Policy Division, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, noted that the FCC said from the start that they would not cite or fine stations that had trouble running the National EAS Test but added that not filing the reports was a different matter and could be considered grounds for citations and fines.

Beers also told attendees at the NAB's EAS session on Wednesday of NAB week that the majority of the non-reporting stations were "low power" stations.

If you are wondering if your station might be one of the remaining non-reporting stations, Beers announced that the FCC has come up with a way for you to confirm whether they have your report.

Timothy May has been designated as the source of information on National Test reports. You can contact him at timothy.may@fcc.gov and ask him whether your report was received. You should keep a copy of his response with your EAS records.

If for some reason you have not responded as yet, there is still time. Go to the National EAS Test website at:
http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/emergency-alert-system-nationwide-test and follow the instructions for "paper filings."

DEVELOPING SOME STRONG LINKS

Some EAS experts say that in the long run the success of the EAS depends on forging strong links between the emergency management community – the originators of warnings – and the broadcast, cable, and satellite entities subject to Part 11 whose job it is to get those warnings to the public.

FEMA has started the ball rolling with a procedure so state and local emergency managers can send warnings using the federal CAP aggregator. For them to participate, the following path was set out:

1. Take a FEMA online course on IPAWS OPEN, IS-00247
2. Take the online exam and pass it.
3. Apply to their state emergency management agency for approval to originate through the IPAWS OPEN aggregator
4. State emergency management forwards to FEMA approved applicants.
5. Origination privileges are granted

Local and state emergency managers do not need to purchase special EAS equipment to originate. Several software vendors that special-ize in selling to government make CAP warning origination tools. However, as of this writing some but not all have incorporated the IPAWS OPEN profile.

CONTINUING THE PROGRESS

After NAB, the BWWG received word from FEMA that they would take further steps to help forge the vital public/private partnership needed. FEMA has new guidelines for state grant requests that could include funds for training, education projects.

So, while we now know more than we did, there are still many unanswered questions and missing puzzle pieces.

We do know that the June 30th compliance deadline is a hard date, and all subject to Part 11 must be able to accept IPAWS OPEN messages either directly or indirectly by that date. For equipment-specific questions, the best advice is to watch the email list servers and stay current with what you equipment manufacturer has to say.

The ride is not over yet!

Richard Rudman is the Vice Chair of the California SECC and a Core Member of the BWWG. Contact him at rar01@mac.com

Return to The BDR Menu