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EAS ALERTS

We Need A Unified Warning Strategy Now



By Richard Rudman

[February 2018] There are many different approaches to "fixing" the lack of a unified national warning system. Some answers have been around for two decades, but government inertia has moved little since EAS was unveiled. This is especially true since 2011, when the FCC tossed the ball to the FEMA and the result was everyone had to buy new EAS boxes.

Yet, seven years later, they key parts of the puzzle have not yet been assembled. Richard Rudman suggests why.

Quoting from the EAS Forum: *"The FCC FNPRM reply comment period ended August 4, 2011. (FNPRM = Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making). That means we are (2/15/18) at SEVEN YEARS, SEVEN MONTHS, TWO WEEKS, AND COUNTING."*

Some people believe, myself included, that the FCC, while having a horse in the race, is not the agency to oversee how the race course is built or who gets to fire the starting gun.

I believe the overall responsibility to overhaul our emergency public information (EPI) and the subset of emergency public warnings lies elsewhere. Broadcasting / media are the delivery system and the long overdue national warning policy must begin with a top down overall strategy that starts with warning origination.

WARNINGS ARE PART OF A UNIFIED STRATEGY

This means recognizing that warnings are an integral component of emergency response.

Some may believe that we can "fix" warnings downstream in the distribution system with a Part 11 rewrite. This is like turning on a water tap in your house, seeing nothing coming out, and trying to fix the problem on your property after finding out that all your neighbors are also without water. Going back to my equine analogy, it is locking the barn door after the horses are gone.

Problems with any system or policy start when there is no coordinated unified strategy to drive the planning and training for all the elements needed to execute. We see this time and time again when warning systems are tested and also

when they have to be used for real. Part 11 cannot do this by itself, no matter how dire and overdue the need to rewrite it is.

IT TAKES ALL RESOURCES TO WORK

We also live in an era where social media and cell phone providers are, whether we like it or not, parts of the overall warning stable.

Coordination of information that flows out on Twitter and all of the other horses in the warning stable has to be done. The only place to do that is where warnings originate. That is not in any way shape or form the in the purview of the FCC.

Simply stated, timely EPI and warnings to people at risk to help save more lives and property has to be looked at as an integral part of emergency management, not just as FCC policies and practices to delivering warnings through mass media.

THE NECESSARY PATH

I submit until the United States and all of its 50 states, territories, and protectorates has a total, unified warning strategy that is set in stone in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), we will continue to spin our wheels on planning, training, testing and execution of this vital human function.

This will require Congress to set the groundwork, bringing all the parties together, cooperating to bring the warning the unified cohesion necessary.

Looking to the FCC, FEMA, or NOAA/NWS as individual entities cannot get it done.

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He is Vice Chair, California State Emergency Communications Committee (SECC), 1990-present, Core Member, Broadcast Warning Working Group (BWWG), Founding Trustee, Partnership For Public Warning, 2001-2003, and Chair, Los Angeles County Local Emergency Communications Committee, 1996-2002.

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