



March 16, 2009

Emergency Messaging Protocol Released for Public Comment

Earlier this month a document was released for public comment which will play a key role in the development of the next-generation Emergency Alert System (EAS). This document, and the need for it in the first place, arises from development of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS) which is "...the nation's next-generation infrastructure of alert and warning networks that will expand upon the traditional audio-only radio and television EAS by providing one message over more media to more people before, during, and after a disaster."

The document just released is entitled the "Common Alerting Protocol Version 1.1 - USA Integrated Public Alert and Warning System Profile Version 1.0" but is typically referred to as the "CAP v1.1 IPAWS Profile." Briefly, the protocol described in this document defines the standard ways in which emergency alert information is to be exchanged under IPAWS between the government and emergency alert providers such as radio and TV broadcasters.



This protocol is expected to form the basis for a new generation of EAS broadcast equipment. The FCC, in its *Second Report and Order* adopted in July 2007 on what is commonly called "next generation EAS," established the requirement that EAS participants (e.g., broadcasters) must accept messages using a common messaging protocol based on the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) v1.1 standard, no later than 180 days after FEMA publicly publishes its adoption of such a standard. A copy of the Second Report and Order is on the FCC's web page at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-07-109A1.pdf.

The Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS), a not-for-profit consortium that "...drives the development, convergence and adoption of open standards for the global information society," was charged with developing this document by FEMA. Within OASIS, this work was done by the Emergency Management Technical Committee (TC), also responsible for standardization of the original version of CAP upon which the current document is based. The March 3, 2009 release for comment by OASIS of the CAP v1.1 IPAWS Profile is part of the OASIS standards adoption process; once this process is completed, it is expected that FEMA will at that time identify this document as the standard which will initiate the 180 day adoption period for broadcasters established by the FCC.

According to the introduction, this Profile was developed primarily by integrating requirements related to three federal warning-delivery systems:

- the broadcast EAS as recommended by the EAS-CAP Industry Working Group;
- the NOAA Non-Weather Emergency Message (NWEM) "HazCollect" program for weather radio and other delivery systems as derived from technical documentation; and,
- the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) for cellular telephones as described in the recommendations of the Commercial Mobile Service Alert Advisory Committee (CMSAAC).

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There is considerable debate among broadcasters and others in the emergency alerting community about exactly how this new standard, and new equipment which conforms to it, will actually be deployed. Some broadcasters have expressed concern that the 180 day timeline established by the FCC for deployment of CAP-based EAS will be difficult or impossible to achieve, in part because the government's equipment approval process has yet to be defined, and it is unclear when the equipment necessary to meet the timeline requirement will be available.

Some useful resources for those interested in learning more about EAS and the IPAWS program are available on the Internet:

- **FCC:** the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau has an EAS web page at www.fcc.gov/pshs/services/eas/index.html;
- **IPAWS:** FEMA's IPAWS program has a web page at www.fema.gov/emergency/ipaws/;
- **SBE:** the Society of Broadcast Engineers has a very complete and detailed analysis of the current state of the evolution of EAS on their web page at www.sbe.org/gov_eas.php. Of particular interest is a white paper entitled "The EAS CAP Roadmap - A Strategy for Implementing the Common Alerting Protocol for a Next Generation Emergency Alert System," an effort of the EAS CAP Roadmap Coordinating Committee (at www.sbe.org/documents/RoadmapPubDoc11-21-08.doc);
- **OASIS:** the Emergency Management TC, responsible for the CAP Profile just released for comment, has a web page at www.oasis-open.org/committees/tc_home.php?wg_abbrev=emergency.

The official announcement from OASIS on the release of the CAP v1.1 IPAWS Profile is available on the OASIS web page at <http://lists.oasis-open.org/archives/tc-announce/200903/msg00001.html>. Comments must be submitted to OASIS by May 2, 2009. Instruction on submitting comments may be obtained by selecting the "Send A Comment" button at the top of the OASIS Emergency Management TC's web page at www.oasis-open.org/committees/emergency/.

