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TV TechCheck

NAB NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS

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FCC Releases Revised EAS CAP Rules

On January 10, 2012, the FCC released its long awaited decision regarding the integration of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) into the Emergency Alert System (EAS). In the Fifth Report and Order (R&O), the FCC continues its efforts to modernize the EAS by revising its Part 11 rules to specify how broadcasters and other EAS Participants must be able to process CAP formatted EAS alert messages. The R&O also formalizes the integration of EAS with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) and details the requirements necessary for broadcasters to receive and process federal alert messages.

The R&O continues the FCC's transitional approach to implementing a next generation, CAP-only EAS. The new rules allow broadcasters to accept CAP-based alerts, and then convert and distribute such messages in the legacy EAS format (SAME) over the existing transmission system as they do today, at least for the foreseeable future until a next generation CAP-only alerting system is implemented. For the time being, CAP will be introduced as a parallel mechanism to the existing EAS.

Among other things, the R&O:

- Reaffirms that broadcasters and other EAS participants must have CAP-capable equipment installed and operating no later than June 30, 2012.
- Eliminates the so called "Governor's Must Carry" requirement. That is, EAS Participants are no longer required to broadcast emergency messages initiated by state governors.
- Requires broadcasters to interface with and monitor FEMA's IPAWS server for federal CAP-formatted EAS messages, but did not specify a particular technology, thus allowing broadcasters the flexibility to adapt to whatever technology FEMA might implement in the future.
- Because IPAWS monitoring will be largely conducted via an Internet connection, the FCC will consider, on a case by case basis, applications for waivers from this monitoring requirement based on the physical lack of availability of broadband.
- Adopts the EAS-CAP Industry Group's (ECIG) Implementation guide, which describes how to convert CAP-formatted messages to SAME-formatted messages, except for the sections referring to the use of text-to-speech technology and the gubernatorial "must carry" (see below).
- Adopts a requirement that, effective June 30, 2012, broadcasters must use the enhanced text data in the CAP-formatted message – when available – to create the visual display elements (*i.e.* text crawl) of an EAS alert**.** However, the R&O also states that the FCC will continue to use the SAME header codes as the baseline requirement of the visual display. It is unclear how these two things interrelate and may require clarification.
- Allows for the use of intermediary devices that receive and convert CAP-formatted messages into SAME formatted messages that would be input into a station's legacy EAS equipment for broadcast over–the-air. Thus, stations that have already purchased these devices may continue using them.
- Requires intermediary devices must meet the CAP-related obligations with respect to use of the enhanced text capability no later than June 30, 2015.
- Appears to prohibit the use of text-to-speech technology in a CAP-capable EAS device, but yet does not seem to prohibit its use with legacy SAME-based EAS devices. This issue may also require clarification.
- Shortens the duration of the EAS 2-tone attention signal to eight seconds.

The R&O also adopts a variety of minor changes to Part 11 intended to clarify certain EAS obligations and removes some antiquated sections of the rules. A copy of the Report and Order is available at the FCC website at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-12-7A1.pdf .

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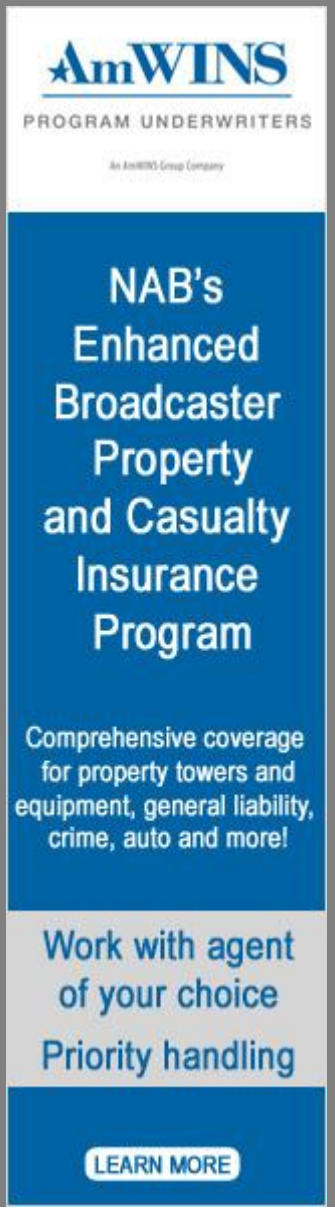

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