

TV TechCheck

The Weekly NAB Newsletter for TV Broadcast Engineers



Stations Must Comply with New FCC Electronic Newsroom Technique Best Practices by June 30

On February 24, 2014, the FCC released an Order adopting new rules regarding the quality of closed captions for video programming. In general, the Commission adopted non-quantitative quality standards regarding the accuracy, synchronicity, completeness and placement for closed captioning of pre-recorded, live, and near-live programming and established best practices for the provision of good quality captions. Also, as part of that order, the FCC imposed new requirements on broadcasters that use Electronic Newsroom Technique (ENT) to caption their live news programming based on a set of best practices. The deadline for stations to implement the best practices and comply with the new rules is **June 30, 2014**.



Electronic Newsroom Technique (ENT) is a process in which the teleprompter script from a live program (e.g. newscast) is used as the text for closed captions. This is done in lieu of using a real-time caption service. Current FCC rules prohibit the four major national broadcast networks and their affiliates in the 25 largest DMAs from using ENT to caption live programming. Consumer groups have complained to the FCC that the use of ENT often resulted in unscripted but important segments of a newscast being left uncaptioned, e.g. weather, sports and live field reports. They asked the FCC to eliminate (i.e. prohibit) ENT captioning for all stations.

Based on a proposal from NAB and others, the Commission amended its rules adopting a manner in which broadcast stations, not subject to the prohibition on ENT, will be deemed in compliance with the captioning. The FCC adopted a list of ENT best practices (which they have designated “enhanced ENT procedures”), listed below, which offer stations a means to continue using ENT, and a means to improve caption quality for consumers, without requiring all stations to assume the cost of real-time captioning of all news programming. The Commission stated that they anticipate these procedures will ensure that most in-studio programming, such as weather, sports, news and entertainment, as well as breaking news and on-the-scene programming will be made more accessible to viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing.

ENT Best Practices

Accordingly, the FCC now requires that, as of June 30, 2014, in order to be deemed in compliance with the rules requiring captioning of live programming, broadcast stations must adhere to the following procedures in the ordinary course of their news/business operations if they continue to use ENT for live programming:

- In-studio produced programming will be scripted. These scripted elements will include in-studio news, sports, weather, and entertainment programming.
- For weather interstitials where there may be multiple segments within a news program, weather information explaining the visual information on the screen and conveying forecast information will be scripted, although the scripts may not precisely track the words used on air.
- Pre-produced programming will be scripted (to the extent technically feasible).
- If live interviews, live on-the scene and/or breaking news segments are not scripted, stations shall supplement them with crawls, textual information, or other means (to the extent technically feasible).
- These provisions do not relieve stations of their obligations to comply with requirements regarding the accessibility of programming providing emergency information under 47 C.F.R. § 79.2.
- Stations will provide training to all news staff on scripting for improving ENT.
- Stations will appoint an “ENT Coordinator” accountable for compliance

To the extent it is not technically feasible for a particular station to comply with the new requirements by June 30, the station may request additional time by seeking a limited waiver of the effective date, supported by an appropriate good cause showing. Any station may, in lieu of following the enhanced ENT procedures, provide real-time captioning on their live programming.

One year after the effective date of the rules, the FCC will reevaluate the effectiveness of these ENT enhancements in providing people who are deaf and hard of hearing with full access to television news programming.

The Report and Order is in CG Docket No. 05-23. A copy is available [here](#).

