FCC RELEASES TEXT OF EAS REPORT AND ORDER

On July 12, 2007 the FCC released the text of the Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (EB Docket No. 04-296) regarding improvements to the Emergency Alert System (EAS). The item was actually adopted by the Commission at its May meeting but it has taken some time for the text to be released. This Second Order and Further Notice is based on a 2005 First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in which the FCC sought comment on expediting the development of a Next Generation EAS network and in response to a June 2006 Presidential Executive Order directing the Commission to “adopt rules to ensure that communications systems have the capacity to transmit alerts and warnings to the public as part of the public alert and warning system.” (See the 11/21/05 and 07/10/06 issues of TV TechCheck.)

In the Second Report and Order (Second Order) portion of the item, the FCC revised Part 11 Emergency Alert System (EAS) in order to “ensure the efficient, rapid, and secure transmission of EAS alerts in a variety of formats (including text, audio and video) and via different means (broadcast, cable, satellite and other networks).”

The Second Order adopts requirements that EAS Participants must accept a message using a common messaging protocol based on Common Alerting Protocol v1.1 (CAP), no later than 180 days after FEMA publicly publishes its adoption of such standard. CAP is an open, interoperable standard published by OASIS (http://www.oasis-open.org). It uses an XML-based format that facilitates data sharing across different distribution systems. The CAP message format permits links to voice, audio or data files, images, and multilingual translations of the alert, and to links providing further information. CAP also supports capabilities for a digital signature to authenticate the sender and validate the integrity of the text, and an encryption field that enables the encryption of the CAP message. An EAS initiator may encrypt, address, and otherwise secure a CAP alert.

The Second Order also requires EAS Participants to adopt whatever next generation EAS delivery systems FEMA develops, no later than 180 days after FEMA publicly releases standards for those systems. In addition, Wireline Video providers such as Verizon’s Fios and AT&T’s U-verse are now required to deliver EAS messages to their subscribers.

Finally, the FCC is now requiring EAS Participants to transmit state and local EAS alerts that are originated by governors or their designees. This requirement also goes into effect no later than 180 days after FEMA publishes its adoption of the CAP standard, provided that the state has a Commission-approved EAS state plan that provides for delivery of such alerts.

The Further Notice portion of the item seeks comment on four issues.

- How non-English speakers may best be served by national, state and local EAS. The Commission has directed the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau to convene a meeting — or series of meetings — as soon as possible concerning EAS as it relates to the needs of non-English speakers and must submit into the record a progress report on these discussions within 30 days of this Order’s release.

- The best way to make EAS and other emergency information accessible to persons with disabilities, including, but not necessarily limited to: (1) presentation of the audio feed in text format, and vice-versa; (2) making emergency information available to various devices commonly used by persons with disabilities; and (3) providing emergency messages in multiple formats to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
• Whether EAS Participants should be required to receive and transmit alerts initiated by government entities other than a state governor. That is, should local, county, tribal, or other state governmental entities be allowed to initiate mandatory state and local alerts?

• Options for ensuring that EAS operates as designed in an emergency, including whether the FCC should require: (1) additional testing of the EAS, and specifically CAP; (2) station certification of compliance; and (3) assessments of EAS performance after an alert has been triggered.


ATSC Digital Television 8-VSB Transmission System Fundamentals & Measurement Seminar
Thursday and Friday, August 9 & 10
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs, FL

A 1½-day seminar will be presented on the ATSC's digital television (DTV) vestigial sideband (VSB) transmission system fundamental concepts & measurement methodologies. This seminar, a combination of the original VSB Fundamentals seminar and the new VSB Measurements seminar, is aimed at broadcasters, broadcast consultants, equipment manufacturers (broadcast, consumer, & test), translator/LPTV operators, and cable operators. The seminar will help you develop a basic understanding of 8-VSB transmission system basics as well as measurement techniques in the laboratory, at a transmitter site, and at remote field test sites. Practical test equipment information such as features, options, specs, & other performance requirements will be covered. For additional information contact Gary Sgrignoli, Meintel, Sgrignoli & Wallace at (847) 259-3352 or Gary.Sgrignoli@IEEE.org or Cheryl Hartline, WKMG-DT, (407) 521-1263 or chartline@wkmg.com.