

AM Radio is Vital to Ensuring Public Safety



 **NAB**[®]
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS

Introduction

AM radio plays an essential role in our nation's emergency communication infrastructure. Its ability to transmit signals over long distances, wide accessibility and superior resiliency have made **it an invaluable tool for disseminating critical information during various emergency situations.** AM radio's enduring popularity with the American public and the sense of community it provides to diverse populations also underscore the platform's value during times of crisis.

- In a rapidly evolving technological landscape, AM radio has continued to demonstrate its critical role in ensuring public safety.
- **Nearly 4,500 AM radio stations across the U.S.** serve as invaluable mediums for disseminating vital information during times of emergency.

As automakers have begun to remove AM from the automobile dash, recent natural disasters have highlighted that there is no substitute for AM radio – especially not cell phones. Cell towers can fail, the power can go out and internet access is often compromised during these emergencies, leaving AM radio as one of the few communication tools that can consistently deliver critical updates to local communities. In the interest of public safety, it is important that Congress pass the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act, which would ensure Americans can continue to access critical information on AM radio even when other networks fail.

AM radio serves our communities during emergencies in two especially important ways: by disseminating emergency alert signals and by providing a reliable source of Americans' most trusted news.

The Enduring Popularity of AM Radio

Recent Nielsen audience data underscores the enduring popularity of AM radio, especially within the context of car listening:

- **Over 82 million Americans** tune in to AM radio monthly.
- Every month, **one out of every three American radio listeners** tunes in to AM radio.
- **57% of AM radio listeners** show a preference for News/Talk stations, emphasizing the role of AM radio as a trusted source of information during times of crisis and for breaking local news.

AM Radio Reaches Diverse Communities Across the U.S.

AM radio serves as a vital platform for connecting diverse communities across the U.S.

- Of the nearly 4,500 AM stations across the U.S., **16%, approximately 735, serve niche or minority audiences**, often delivering content in languages other than English. **Of the 1,500 minority-owned stations, approximately 600 stations broadcast, at least in part, in languages other than English.**
- **Nearly 440 of these stations feature Spanish language or Latino/regional formats**, fostering connections and cultural expression for Spanish-speaking communities.
- Among the more than 82 million Americans who listen to AM, **over 13 million American Latinos aged 12 years and older tune in regularly.**

In rural America, where reliable cellular or broadband access can be scarce, AM radio is an essential lifeline. Farmers rely on AM radio for the latest weather updates, crop reports and local community information. For the agricultural community, radio remains one of the primary sources of daily agricultural news year-round, with listeners dedicating substantial time to stay informed.

- On average, **agricultural radio listeners tune in for at least one hour on a typical weekday, and more than 76% of them rely on the radio for agriculture markets, news, weather and other essential information.**

AM radio's importance to communities of color and rural areas as well as underrepresented groups through its diversity in programming makes it an indispensable medium for reaching and connecting America's diverse communities.

What is AM's Role in an Emergency?

In addition to providing news and connection to its listeners, AM radio plays a specific and indispensable role in the engineering of the Emergency Alert System.

The Emergency Alert System:

- The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is a national public warning system commonly used by state and local authorities to deliver important emergency information, such as weather and AMBER alerts, to affected communities over television and radio. It is an integral part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS).
- EAS can provide the president with the capability to address the American people within 10 minutes during a national emergency.

Backbone of the EAS: 72 radio stations across the U.S. play a crucial role serving as Primary Entry Points (PEPs) across the country, the vast majority of which are AM stations.

- These are designated radio stations whose combined signals cover 90% of the American population and have a direct connection to FEMA and the National Weather Service (NWS). In times of crisis, federal, state and local public safety officials rely on AM stations to disseminate authoritative, accurate information to the public.



Redundancy of AM Radio: Once a designated PEP station receives an emergency alert, it broadcasts the message to other connected radio and television stations in a “daisy chain” fashion. This means that the message is relayed from one station to another, ensuring the rapid and efficient dissemination of critical information. This mechanism allows the emergency alert to reach a wide audience, covering both urban and rural areas, in a short amount of time.

- This system provides built-in redundancy, as multiple AM radio stations within the same area can receive and relay the same emergency information. This ensures that **even if one station is compromised or offline, the message can still be disseminated through other stations, providing a resilient system to keep communities informed during emergencies.**
- This system works in conjunction with FEMA's IPAWS Open web-based process for distributing EAS alerts. However, it is not uncommon for the internet to fail during significant emergencies. PEP stations are constructed to operate even under the most extreme conditions, making the AM-supported daisy chain a failsafe lifeline pathway that ensures EAS continuity.

Recent Use Cases of AM Radio in Emergencies

Maui Wildfires

The Maui wildfires in August of 2023 underscored the critical role of radio in providing essential, life-saving information during natural disasters. With power outages and the loss of cell service and internet access, radio stations in the Maui region became a vital source of information, resources and safety for the affected communities.

- **Lifeline:** Radio played a pivotal role in delivering critical information to residents. With power and cellular communication networks down for days, broadcast radio remained a dependable source for disseminating vital updates.
- **Trusted source of information:** Almost as quickly as the fires began, conspiracy theories and misinformation began to rapidly spread across social media. A lack of timely information from the local government created a void that radio hosts stepped in to fill by proactively reaching out to officials to deliver regular, timely updates in the days after the fires. Hosts fielded questions from callers and pressed officials for answers when citizens weren't getting the answers they desperately needed.
- **Community support:** Radio stations provided a platform for residents to seek and offer assistance, and stations were there to support recovery, organize charitable projects and provide in-depth reporting on the aftermath.



Tubbs Fire

The Tubbs fire raged through Northern California, fueled by strong winds and dry conditions, scorching over 36,000 acres, destroying thousands of homes and claiming the lives of 22 people, making it one of the most destructive and deadly wildfires in California's history at the time. This tragic fire demonstrated the crucial role of radio in providing essential information and support to the community during the crisis. **Pat Kerrigan**, news director at AM news/talk station KSRO, which serves the impacted Sonoma County area in California, played a central role in keeping the public informed during this challenging time.

- **Immediate response by radio personnel:** Kerrigan recognized the significance of the impending fire and went straight to the radio station upon being evacuated from her home in the middle of the night. She was on the air within 15 minutes, starting a continuous broadcast that lasted 12 to 14 hours. Initially, the station had limited information and relied on alerts through Nixle, a private community information service. The first few hours were marked by uncertainty and a lack of communication from authorities as Pat and her team worked to get accurate information out to listeners, even as she did not know whether her own home had been destroyed.
- **Connecting with key contacts:** The station's producer played a pivotal role in contacting important figures from the fire department and CalFire. This led to crucial information being shared with the public and helped establish a structured broadcast.

“I don’t think many electronic media, if any, could do what local radio did. In the first days, most people had no cell phone service, no internet connectivity and no cable TV. [Radio] was the only medium people had access to.”

- **Jim Murphy, operations manager, KSRO**

“It’s very humbling,” Kerrigan said after the fire. “After about the 10th or 20th story about us, I have to believe we did save lives, and that’s pretty profound. The common thread in the messages that we got was that the station provided people with a lifeline; it was the only way they didn’t feel isolated. They said, ‘I couldn’t make it through without you there.’”

Arkansas Tornadoes

KWYN-AM, a long-standing community radio station based in Wynne, Ark., played a crucial role in an emergency on March 31, 2023, when a deadly tornado outbreak hit the town. While facing an EF-3 tornado with 180-mile-per-hour winds that destroyed 84 businesses and homes, KWYN’s early warnings and emergency broadcasts saved lives.

- **Connected to the community:** KWYN received early warnings of the approaching storm, thanks to the vigilance of an NWS-trained storm spotter, Kevin Turner, who alerted the station’s local engineer and operations person, Lane Goodwin. The close relationship between KWYN and the local high school was instrumental. These tornado warnings provided earlier in the day led to the decision to close the school early, potentially saving lives as the tornado devastated the high school.
- **Life-saving information:** Goodwin promptly went on the air to broadcast the tornado’s approach. While the tornado caused significant damage, including the destruction of 84 businesses and homes and damage to 78 more, leaders in the community credit the early warnings broadcast by KWYN for helping to minimize further destruction. There were four fatalities and 30 injuries.



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“And that’s not all. We have a listener, **Ronnie Moore**, who left his home and was driving with KWYN on. I’ve driven with him in his truck. He always has us on. He heard Lane’s announcement about the tornado, realized it was headed for his house, and he immediately turned his truck around and went home where his wife was. They both got in the bathtub and put a mattress over the top. Their entire house and Ronnie’s truck were destroyed, but they both survived. That’s the power of AM radio.”

- **Bobby Caldwell, manager, KWYN-AM**

Proposed Solution

In May 2023, the bicameral, bipartisan “AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act” was introduced.

If passed into law, the Secretary of Transportation has one year to issue a rule requiring vehicles manufactured in or imported into the U.S. to have devices installed that provide access to AM radio. This feature should be easily accessible to the driver. Between the legislation’s enactment and the new standard taking effect, cars lacking AM radio receivers must be explicitly labeled for buyers.

This legislation currently enjoys **support from 240 members of Congress, emergency management officials and other policymakers across the country.** Currently, **over 20 groups from a diverse set of industries are calling for passage** of the legislation, including:

AARP	International Association of Fire Chiefs	National Emergency Management Association
Agricultural Retailers Association	International Fresh Produce Association	National Farmers Union
ALLvanza	Latino Farmers & Ranchers International, Inc.	National Grange
American Dairy Coalition	Latino Media Network	National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC)
American Farm Bureau Federation	Livestock Marketing Association	National Milk Producers Federation
American Feed Industry Association	Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC)	National Sorghum Producers
American Seed Trade Association	National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters (NABOB)	National Urban League
American Sheep Industry Association	National Association of Counties	North Dakota Farmers Union
American Sugarbeet Growers Association	National Association of Farm Broadcasting	NRB (National Religious Broadcasters)
Big City Emergency Managers	National Association of State Departments of Agriculture	OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates
Corn Refiners Association	National Association of Wheat Growers	Organic Trade Association
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists	National Corn Growers Association	Rural & Agriculture Council of America
CropLife America	National Cotton Council	SAG-AFTRA
Farm Credit Council	National Council of Farmer Cooperatives	Texas Sugar Cane Growers
Florida Sugar Cane Growers		The Fertilizer Institute
Hispanic Leadership Fund		U.S. Beet Sugar Association
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota		U.S. Black Chambers
Independent Cattlemen’s Association of Texas		U.S. Cattlemen’s Association
International Association of Emergency Managers		USA Rice
		Women Involved in Farm Economics

NAB is the earliest outside supporter of the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act and has called for swift passage of the legislation. In July 2023, the Senate Commerce Committee overwhelmingly supported the bill as it moved to the Senate floor for consideration, and a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee held a hearing on the importance of AM radio.

We urge the full House and Senate to pass the legislation as soon as possible.