

NEW EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM RULES

EAS-CAP

OCTOBER 2012

NEW RULES

On September 30, 2010 the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") adopted a new digital messaging standard known as the "Common Alerting Protocol", referred to as "CAP", which will transform the Emergency Alert System ("EAS") as we have known it. The new CAP standard is part of the next generation national emergency alert and warning network known as the Integrated Public Alert Warning System, or "IPAWS."

FEMA's purpose for the new system is to create a mechanism to reach as many people as possible by as many communications devices as possible, including radio, television, cell phones, personal computers and other communication devices. Its implementation is anticipated to make it easier for emergency agencies to generate and distribute emergency messages, the overriding purpose and focus of any emergency alert system.

The new EAS rules were codified in the release on January 10, 2012 of the Fifth Report and Order in EB Docket 04-296. Some changes were incorporated into the R&O from that which had been previously proposed, most notable among these the elimination of the "Governor Must-Carry" messages. Additionally, the previous "Non-participating National" ("NN") designation status has been eliminated along with the "Emergency Action Termination" ("EAT") which permits EAS devices to receive national emergency alerts in the same format as AMBER alerts. Once these

messages have been relayed, the station can issue an "End of Message" ("EOM") and return to regular programming.

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Lastly, given current technology challenges, the CAP "text to speech" conversion protocol has been eliminated. The November 2011 national test revealed a number of problems that still need to be resolved for the new CAP system to be the effective emergency alert tool it was conceptualized to be as a replacement for the legacy EAS system.

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

With respect to equipment needs, the next generation EAS will communicate in language that permits links to voice, audio or data files, images, and multilingual translations of alerts, as well as links providing additional information. It will have authentication and encryption capabilities. Conversion of existing EAS equipment to CAP capability will require modification of existing EAS decoders and possibly full replacement, depending on the age of the equipment.

All of the existing manufacturers of EAS equipment offer equipment compliant with the new system. Some newer units are CAP compatible with a firmware upgrade while other older units require CAP-to-EAS decoder boxes to translate the newer standard to the older one. In the case of still older equipment, full replacement of

the EAS box is necessary. Budget figures associated with a CAP converter are in the vicinity of \$1,350 and the range for new EAS receivers is currently between \$2,300 and \$6,500, or higher.

WHEN WILL THE NEW RULES BECOME EFFECTIVE?

The new EAS/CAP rules became effective on April 23, 2012 and require that CAP compliant equipment be installed and operational as of June 30, 2012. In the recently released Fifth Report and Order in Docket 04-296, the Commission resolved a number of issues related to the implementation of the new service. This included the retention of the prior EAS protocol but requires that EAS participants be capable of receiving CAP formatted messages and the ability to convert essential information through traditional EAS technology which is known as "Specific Area Message Encoding" ("SAME"). Briefly, SAME is the analog system and CAP the new digital system capable of transmitting information in various formats – audio, video, internet, etc.

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All stations are required to have EAS decoders. Class D FM, LPFM and low power TV stations are not required to have EAS encoders. In the case of an emergency, a non participating station would direct listeners to tune to a participating EAS station and go silent during the relaying of the EAS message.

Specifics related to the implementation of EAS-CAP should be discussed and addressed by your FCC legal counsel, qualified contract or chief engineer or consulting engineer.

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