

The Source Information Radio News - December 2015

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Safety agencies disseminate instant incident information.

New public information tool has support of emergency management, public health, law enforcement and highway safety.

ZEELAND, MI: Agencies from coast to coast are acquiring a novel communication tool in an effort to prepare for incidents and keep the public better informed during one. Newly designed "VoiceStar" Systems consist of a Portable Changeable Message Sign (PCMS) paired with an onboard information radio station. The operator gains the ability to speak directly to motorists both visually and verbally in virtually any venue. From King County, WA to Oakland County, MI, to Westchester County, NY, numerous agencies whose missions are public safety, voted VoiceStar into their communication arsenals in 2015.

Departments of Transportation have long used Portable Changeable Message Signs – some with radio stations onboard – to talk to motorists approaching highway construction zones. But VoiceStar additionally gives Highway Safety officials the unique ability to reach drivers entering a state with updated information about safety regulations, potential penalties and even a heads-up regarding security situations they may encounter. Because VoiceStar is quite portable, the service can be moved as needed to different thoroughfares.

Says Steve Johnston of Ventura County, CA, "While its utility in disaster response is self-evident, it provides a valuable component to exercises, vaccine clinics and whenever we need to communicate information. Our Auxiliary Communications Volunteers have created a process to create messaging and respond whenever the equipment is activated." Departments of transportation have long employed VoiceStar systems in conjunction with highway construction projects and for major incidents that affect travel.

The VoiceStar product has recently been upgraded by Information Station Specialists to include browser-based control of both the sign text and the broadcast message; an enlarged battery pack and solar array to support independent operation for two to three weeks; multi-media operator training with optional on-site training. The design allows the VoiceStar to be deployed at the scene of an incident and operated/updated remotely from a portable device or desktop PC whenever required. Versions are available minus the Changeable Message Sign or minus the information radio station. [See VoiceStar's main webpage.](#)

Various VoiceStar Operators

- Alabama Department of Transportation
 - Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department
 - De Baca County, NM
 - King County, WA
 - Oakland County, MI
 - Pierce County, WA
 - Robert Dole Veterans Administration Medical Center, KS
 - Snoqualmie County, WA
 - South Carolina Department of Transportation
 - Ventura County, CA
 - Washoe County, NV
 - Westchester County, NY
 - West Virginia University
 - Yellowstone National Park, WY
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TIS Beauty Competition

Could Arches National Park boast "most lovely info station location" in America?

MOAB, UT: In November, the National Park Service installed an Information Station (TIS) for visitors near the entrance to Arches National Park in Utah, which has a breathtakingly beautiful backdrop. Surrounded by sage and surreal canyon lands, *The Source* asks if this might just be the "most awesome" setting for a TIS antenna anywhere in the 50 states? Do you have a shot you can put up against this one? [Send photos to The Source](#), so we can show off the fair side of your facility. We will publish them in an upcoming edition.

Now, for the talent part of the competition, you will have to turn on your radio!

When is interference not really interference?

The FCC's proposed AM rules might aid Hudson County's power petition.

WASHINGTON, DC: On October 23rd, the FCC released a [Report & Order](#) that proposes a change in how most AM broadcast stations* are "protected" from interference. No longer would stations' fringe signal areas receive protection. These new standards would set the stage for some AM broadcasters to apply to increase their power levels to better cover their communities without fear of interfering with neighboring radio stations.

Should these rules take effect, it might help the case for the Hudson County, NJ, information radio station's proposed power increase. The County has asked the FCC to allow it to operate at 100 watts rather than the standard 10 watts, but by doing so, the Hudson station's signal would overlap with the fringe coverage of a nearby broadcaster on an adjacent frequency. The proposed new rules would deem that the overlap would not matter, admitting that any interference that could potentially occur would only be present in areas where listening is not possible anyway due to low signals engulfed in ambient noise.

(* Conventional full-power broadcasters, not information radio stations ([TIS](#))).

Short (on) Waves?

Information radio frequencies continue to be available almost everywhere.

NEW YORK, NY: There are very few places on the US map where there just are not any information radio frequencies left. After nearly 40 years of TIS licensing activity and a rather full AM band to begin with, that's actually pretty surprising.

"Tight spots are mainly in and around our three largest cities – greater Los Angeles, Chicago and New York - where acceptable channels are tougher to find and license," states Information Station Specialists' representative Bill Baker. "But if you plotted all of those zones on a US map, they would be so small that you'd be hard pressed to spot them."

Despite the unlikelihood, if an applicant finds himself in one of those spots, determining a good frequency to apply for can be a challenge without [professional help](#). The FCC has allowed some agencies to apply for the 1710 AM frequency – which is outside the normal AM band – if they could make a showing that all other AM channels failed to meet the separation parameters in Part 90 of the Commission's rules. Recalls Baker, "One local government agency we are aware of applied for seven different frequencies until an adequate one was found. Thankfully, that's the exception and not the rule!"
