

The Source Information Radio Newsletter (June 2017)

Published by Information Station Specialists (theRADIOsource.com)

Getting Emergency Notifications to Drivers - without Distraction

Los Alamos County First EMA to Roll Out New ENcast Service

LOS ALAMOS COUNTY, NM: Reading texts while driving can be deadly. But now one county plans to send text-based emergency notifications (normally delivered only to portable phones and PCs) simultaneously to drivers to hear on car radios.

Emergency Manager Beverley Simpson will be implementing this new capability called ENcast (www.theRADIOsource.com/products/encast.htm) this summer as an enhancement to the County's existing pair of ALERT AM Emergency Advisory Radio Stations (www.theRADIOsource.com/products/alert-am.htm).

"Obviously we don't want to push important text messages for people and expect them to try to read them while they try to drive," states Simpson. "It's not only unsafe but also illegal in most states."

The County generates emergency text messages using their Code Red Notification System (https://www.losalamosnm.us/government/departments/emergency_management___e_m_/phone_alerting_system/). But soon, when messages are issued, ENcast will receive the messages and interrupt the radio program with a verbal version of the notification that will repeat for 30 minutes for drivers to hear.

Only 6 years ago, Los Alamos and its National Labs were required to evacuate due to the Las Conchas Wildfire that threatened them. Torching more than 156,000 acres, the fire was the largest in state history in 2011. (See the Los Alamos case study: www.theRADIOsource.com/articles/case-study-los-alamos-nm.htm.)

FCC: Please think inside the box.

Commission puts petitions for "TIS on FM" and "30-watt TIS" on shelf.

WASHINGTON, DC: The FCC is not saying that it's impossible to put a Travelers Information Station on the FM band or that the Miami International Airport (MIA) can never operate its TIS at 30 watts instead of 10. It's just that the petitioners who want to do that didn't present particularly compelling or comprehensive arguments.

On April 17, 2017, the FCC rejected a Petition for Rulemaking (https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-17-364A1.pdf), which, if permitted to proceed, could have allowed the Service to inhabit the left edge of the FM band at Frequency 87.9 – in addition to its current home on AM. Applicants Robert Coyle and Claude Parker had argued that an FM channel would allow the Service to function on a band with more listeners, better audio quality

and with less interference.

The Commission did not push back against those assertions but did say that Coyle and Parker's arguments were insufficient; *i.e.*, the request did not consider interference that TIS stations would cause to adjacent FM stations and to TV stations that use 87.9 FM to transmit audio. It also pointed out that more TV stations will likely be using 87.9 MHz soon and that the petition did not show that the existing TIS service on AM lacks channels or is otherwise insufficient.

Finally, the FCC stated that the request is "preliminary," because in 2015 it acted to improve audio quality of TIS stations by allowing external filters to widen bandwidth to 5000 Hz. The FCC wants "more time to evaluate" the effects of that upgrade.

On May 25, 2017, the Commission turned back (http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2017/db0525/DA-17-512A1.pdf) a request by Miami-Dade County on behalf of Miami International Airport to increase the wattage of its TIS station threefold to 30 watts. The County argued that the possibility of a terrorist attack or other emergency would warrant an increase in the coverage footprint so MIA could "keep people away from the airport" or "guide them to alternative locations."

But the nearby City of Fort Lauderdale – which operates on the same 1610 AM frequency – filed a petition to deny the waiver that was ultimately upheld by the Commission. In dismissing the request, the FCC noted that Miami-Dade "should have coordinated its proposal with Fort Lauderdale" and that MIA's proposal "could degrade the TIS coverage of Fort Lauderdale and Sunrise" – a nearby city that also operates on AM 1610.

Radio is the "go to" medium in emergencies.

WASHINGTON, DC: In a survey conducted in March of this year, 2,251 adults were asked which media they would choose for immediate news and directions in an emergency. Not surprisingly, radio/TV media trumped all others – text, cable and web – combined.

Radio, of course, plays an outsized role when compared with TV, because it is much more mobile; and, in a vehicle setting, it operates without grid power. The study goes a long way to explaining why communities – especially those that have suffered significant power outages – will install emergency advisory radio stations to communicate with their citizens.*

TOP MEDIA IN EMERGENCIES

Local Radio and TV	57%
Text Messages	15%
Online News Sites	14%
Cable News	12%

*Source: "Morning Consult Online Survey" Commissioned
by the National Association of Broadcasters*

The study was referenced by the House Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Communications and Technology at a May hearing in which various members Congress weighed in.

Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) recalled when Superstorm Sandy slammed the Eastern Seaboard in 2012: "Radio and TV broadcasting played a crucial role in saving lives in letting people know how to stay out of harm's way." (See emergency advisory radio article "Withstanding Sandy": www.theRADIOsource.com/articles/news-2012-oct.htm).

NAB Technology Chief Sam Matheny told the Subcommittee that local media are the only ones that the public feels it can trust in a disaster, as illustrated by the study. Perhaps that is because, as emergency managers say, "All emergencies are local." The public naturally knows as well that the most accurate emergency information is local. (See a state-by-state list of emergency advisory radio stations across America: www.theRADIOsource.com/resources/stations-alert.htm.)

() Following the massive Northeastern Power Outage of 2003, dozens of cities installed emergency advisory radio stations that operate on generator power. More than 20 such stations still operate in the greater Detroit and Cleveland areas.*