

The Source Information Radio Newsletter

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Starting from Ash

Gatlinburg Upgrades Warning Systems to Include Innovative Emergency Radio Stations.

GATLINBURG, TN: The Smoky Mountains were aptly described 11 months ago when a wind-driven wildfire seared a community best known as a traditional family get-away. But the message from Gatlinburg public safety officials the night of November 28, 2016, was “get away now.”

The fire had been on officials’ radar for 5 days, smoldering in neighboring Great Smoky Mountains National Park. With little warning, winds clocked at 87 miles per hour began to topple trees into power poles, igniting secondary fires. Just as night fell on the 28th, the inland hurricane began to drive the flames across the drought-parched mountains and right to the outskirts of a city packed with Thanksgiving weekend guests. Officials began a massive evacuation that would total 14,000 residents and visitors.

The speed and ferocity of the firestorm overwhelmed Gatlinburg’s safety systems: Cellular towers overloaded. Fire fighters had issues with communications. 911 services were flooded; calls had to be rerouted to other counties. The Emergency Operation Center’s phone system lost power. Fire hydrants went dry when water pumping stations lost power or burned. Fire Chief Greg Miller requested assistance from Sevier County and eventually the call went out to the entire state of Tennessee.

Gone in one evening were more than 2,500 buildings in Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and surrounding areas. Entire neighborhoods were reduced to smoking foundations. Due to a super-human evacuation effort mounted by local officials, the loss of life was limited to 14.

One afternoon three months later, [Information Station Specialists’](#) president Bill Baker received a phone call from a Gatlinburg man whose family had narrowly survived. The voice on the line described a surreal night. The caller had witnessed elderly neighbors crawling down a wooded hillside to escape the inferno; his wife and kids had crowded into a community swimming pool fully clothed. “If an emergency radio system is not proposed as a communication solution in this town, I will be speaking to city council myself,” he declared. Baker was able to assure the caller that his city officials were already in the planning stages to install just such a system.

The hope is, of course, that it will never happen again. But if there IS a “next time,” residents who are evacuating will have an [Emergency Advisory Radio System](#) to guide them to the proper escape route based on the fire’s location. They will be able to hear as issued via car radio [verbalized emergency messages](#) – the same ones that appear in text form on portable devices.

Three synchronized emergency radio stations are being installed that will provide total coverage to Gatlinburg and the Spur road that connects communities to the north. The signal will also be heard in parts of the National Park as well. The system of emergency radio stations is made possible by a recent FCC Report and Order that details how the [Travelers Information Radio Service \(TIS\)](#) can be leveraged in an emergency to protect life and property. The ruling clarifies that local safety officials have total authority to manage the content on the stations during times of crisis; and that networks of emergency stations can be set up to tailor coverage based on the needs of host communities.

Expansion of Gatlinburg’s network of stations into nearby communities, such as Pigeon Forge, Sevierville and others, is anticipated along with the addition of special advisory signage. Ultimately, this expansion will become a countywide communication tool under the command of the Sevier County Emergency Management Agency. The radio system will be integrated with 14 outdoor warning sirens and a text/email/phone notification system to provide a comprehensive means of alerting residents and visitors no matter where they are – on foot, in cars or at home.

Florida City to Launch All-Creole Info Radio Station

North Miami Beach First to Utilize TIS to Transmit Safety Advisories to Non-English-Speaking Residents

NORTH MIAMI BEACH, FL: It turns out that certain subpopulations in South Florida prefer to take news and information by radio instead of via the Internet or social media. Case in point: at North Miami Beach, which has a Creole-speaking population exceeding 20%, the City is exploring repurposing their **ALERT AM Emergency Advisory Radio Station** to get critical information to those of Haitian origin and other residents who name Creole as their primary language. "We believe this station can be a critical tool to reach this critical audience," states City Spokesman Brian Andrews. "They are often bypassed by conventional media."

North Miami Beach is in the process of changing the location and frequency of their radio station after Hurricane Irma's devastation. New capabilities will allow it to broadcast farther and with more clarity due the addition of an **audio processor** and a file-based message player. The antenna is being relocated to City Hall to give it a higher profile.

"This is a great way to reach out to a special population," adds Andrews. "Thanks to **Information Station Specialists** for their coordination with the FCC to make it all happen."

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