

Washington SECC Meeting March 9, 2021

The meeting was held virtually via Zoom. Roll call began at 930 PST with the meeting starting 6 minutes later, wrapping up at 10:26.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved. There were no additional agenda items.

The goal is to have the meeting run no more than an hour.

Ted has a new amateur radio call, W6TOR.

The next Cascadia Rising earthquake drill will be in the middle of June 2022. It is a sequel to the 2016 exercise and will last 4 days. It will start 96 hours after the quake when recovery efforts are getting underway. Preparatory meetings will be starting shortly and will continue through early 2022.

The Plan Revision Committee has been meeting every 2 to 3 weeks. Until now, the main focus has been on getting the new state (WA-PAWS) plan up and running. They will now be starting on the recent FCC NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rule Making). They will be providing feedback to the FCC. This is in preparation for the new FCC reporting system, ARS (Alert Reporting System). It is not known yet when the new state plan, WA-PAWS, will debut and replace the current Washington State EAS Plan.

The recent FCC EAS NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking) and NOI (Notice of Inquiry) was discussed. They are very detailed and quite lengthy. A summary of them is attached to the end of the minutes. The SECC will be submitting comments to the commission, as we have for every previous proposal from the commission. Our group has been influential in having the FCC adopt our proposals because we do file comments. If you are interested in being part of this process you are encouraged to join the Plan Revision Committee. They meet virtually every 2-3 weeks on Mondays at 6:30 PM. The next meeting is on March 22. They are also announced on the remailer. The deadline for filing comments is May 9. The FCC will then send it back out with everybody's comments. The replies to the comments are due June 9. Typically, comments come from other SECC's, broadcast and cable companies and organizations, emergency managers, government agencies and other interested parties. Reply comments can show agreement/disagreement or amplification or clarification. To attend the committee meeting, contact Clay on the remailer.

The FCC will host the parts of the state plan that they are interested in. The entire WA-PAWS plan will be on the state website similar to how the current plan is posted.

The new FCC ARS (Alert Reporting System) will facilitate communication between the SECC and the FCC. Only state, tribal and local entities will have access to it for security reasons. It will bring some standardization among the various state plans. The FCC is creating a format, and all the SECC's are filling in the blanks and populating the requested information.

In the recent AMBER alert some county names were mangled. The audio part of the message was generated by the AlertSense text to speech engine and was not reviewed by the duty officer before it was sent. This has been addressed.

The plan revision committee has been working on a FAQ. These are mostly technical questions. If you have a question, or know of something that should be included, contact the committee through the remailer.

Ted has been asked to present at the next WECCWG conference. He will also do an EAS 101 presentation for the Snoqualmie Valley and Jefferson County amateur radio groups. He is still trying to work with the FEMA Headquarter for training for EAS users. The EAS-101 training presentation continues to evolve as the FCC, ARS, and WA-PAWS move forward.

In the Central Puget Sound local area, Kitsap County did the RMT. It went great!

In the Coastal local area, there were some problems with the RMT's over the last year due to various problems, but they are now back on track. The LECC met recently to work on updating their local plan. They are also working on getting the local relay network back in operation. They discussed making a change in the leadership structure by having the Emergency Management side chair the committee. It will be discussed further and no changes are imminent.

In the Inland area, the RMT's are working.

In Mason-Thurston, the RMT's are going OK. The LRN was tested successful in January. John Price is stepping down as chair effective June 1.

In the North Central local area, there was an authentication problem when they tried to run the RMT. It was solved just in time to run it within the prescribed window.

In AMBER news, Carri reports that she has received some complaints about audio levels. This is probably a problem with the viewer's local cable system and that's who they should contact. When reports are received about problems with EAS messages, it is helpful to find out who the complainant is watching or listening to and where they are located. It helps in troubleshooting.

Monte reports that amateur radio activities are pretty much on hold due to COVID.

The Shake alert test was sent on February 25. You had to have the right phone and opt-in to receive the WEA test message. You do not have to opt-in to receive non-test WEA messages.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, May 11, 2021, at 9:30 AM PDT and most likely on Zoom again.

SECC MEETING ROLL CALL – March 9, 2021

POSITION	NAME	PRESENT
Chair	Clay Freinwald	X
Vice Chair	Ted Buehner	X
WEMD Chair	Chis Utzinger	
WEMD A&W	Tony Clark	
WEMD Multilingual	Lewis Lujan	
NWS	Reid Wolcott	
WEA -	Bill Peters	
WSP Amber Coordinator	Carri Gordon	X
Eastern WA Leaders	Sandi Duffy	X
	Charlie Osgood	X
Data Base Mgr	Simone Ramel-McKay	
FEMA Reg 10	Laura Goodreau	
	Lloyd Kimball	X
Technical Committee	Lowell Kiesow	X
Comm Systems Chair	Phil Johnson	X
Cable TV - Comcast	Cami Peacock	
Recording Secretary	Terry Spring	X
Amateur Radio	Monte Simpson	X
Test Coordinator	Roland Robinson	
WSAB	Keith Shipman	

LECC Chairs

OPERATIONAL AREA	NAME	PRESENT
Central Puget	Phil Johnson	X
Clallam	Anne Chastain	
Coastal	Hannah Cloverly Pat Anderson	X
Columbia Basin	Sean Davis	
Cowlitz/Wahkiakum	John Mackey Beau Renfro	X
Inland N.W.	Simone Ramel-McKay	
Kittitas	Brad Tacher Nicholas Elliot	
Lewis	Larry Minor Scott Mattoon Andy Caldwell	
Mason/Thurston	John Price	X
North Central	Charlie Osgood Sandi Duffey	X X
No. Puget Sound	Dan McDermott Jay Morrison	
Okanogan	Maurice Goodall John Andrist	
Yakima		

SUMMARY OF FCC EAS NPRM & NOI FROM PUBLISHED SOURCES

FROM RADIO WORLD

Propose rule changes to combine the current non-optional class of WEA “Presidential Alerts” with FEMA Administrator Alerts into a **new alert class called “National Alerts.”** The NPRM also asks whether the FCC should adopt a new **alert originator code called the National Command Authority (NCA) code** that would enable FEMA to issue alerts related to national security events,

Whether it should create a new event code for national security event-related alerts issued by FEMA called the **National Security Event (NSE) event code** that would encompass “warnings of national security events, meaning emergencies of national significance, such as a missile threat, terror attack, or other act of war or threat to public safety.”

Propose to amend the annual State EAS Plan reporting rule to require certification that SECCs have held a meeting in the past year, propose to provide a checklist of required information for annual State EAS Plan reports, and propose to amend the commission’s rule for review and approval or rejection of annual State EAS Plan reports.

Propose rules for the FEMA administrator or a state, local, tribal or territorial government to voluntarily **report EAS or WEA false alerts to the FCC Operations Center.** The READI Act requires the FCC to establish a way to receive reports of **false alerts** under the Emergency Alert System or the Wireless Emergency Alerts System, so it can track them and study their causes

Propose a rule to require repeating EAS messages when certain authorized EAS alert originators want a **message repeated**, and to ensure EAS Participants are technically capable of repeating. The commission was told to modify the Emergency Alert System to provide for **repeating EAS messages** while an alert issued by the president, head of FEMA or other appropriate parties is still pending. This applies to warnings about national security events such as missile threats, terror attacks or acts of war, not to typical local EAS events like weather warnings.

State EAS plans, which are currently accessible on the FCC website, would not be publicly available there except for names and some contact information of the SECC chairs. This is because “disclosure of the plans, at least in form where each plan is one place and in a uniform and easily searchable format, could highlight potential vulnerabilities that malefactors could exploit, thereby potentially hindering emergency planning efforts.”

But also of interest to broadcasters is an instruction from Congress regarding State Emergency Communications Committees.

In the next six months, the FCC is supposed to encourage states to review the makeup and governance of their individual SECCs (and to establish an SECC if one doesn’t exist). Congress then wants each state committee to meet at least annually to review and update its state’s EAS plan and to submit an updated plan to the FCC, which the commission is supposed to review and approve or reject.

The FCC is also supposed to establish a “State EAS Plan content checklist” for SECCs to use when reviewing their EAS plans.

The **Notice of Inquiry** would:

Seek comment on whether it is technically feasible to deliver EAS alerts through the Internet, including through streaming services.

Seek comment on whether and how to leverage the capabilities of the Internet to enhance the alerting capabilities of the radio and television broadcasters, cable systems, satellite radio and television providers, and wireline video providers that currently participate in EAS.

SUMMARY FROM BROADCAST LAW BLOG

FCC To Consider Emergency Alert System Changes and Evaluate the Ability of Streaming Services to Participate in EAS

By [David Oxenford](#) on March 1, 2021

POSTED IN [EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS](#), [INTERNET RADIO](#), [INTERNET VIDEO](#), [ON LINE MEDIA](#)

At its March 17 monthly Open Meeting, the FCC will consider a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking to modify certain aspects of the **Emergency Alert System** used by many of those regulated by the FCC including broadcasters, cable companies, and wireless communications devices such as mobile phones. The FCC is reviewing these issues as required by the **National Defense Authorization Act**, passed by Congress at the end of 2020. As part of its mandate, Congress also asked that the FCC review whether it would be possible to require “**streaming services**” to become EAS participants. A Notice of Inquiry asking that question is included with the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, asking specific questions about the feasibility of that extension of EAS requirements. A draft of the proposals to be considered by the FCC at the March meeting [is available here](#) (the draft is subject to change before the meeting).

The proposed changes include some that may be relevant to broadcasters. These include the requirement that **State Emergency Communications Committees** meet at least yearly to review state EAS plans and certify to the FCC each year that they have in fact met. The FCC will consider and approve all changes to state EAS plans but will no longer make those plans public on the FCC website, as there is a fear that publication of these plans could be used to subvert the emergency alerts.

The proposals also include the ability of national, state and local emergency officials to notify the FCC of any improper activation of the EAS system. Right now, only EAS participants, including broadcasters, have that obligation (see [our article here](#)). The FCC also asks interested parties for suggestions as to how to define what kinds of misuses of the EAS system constitute “**false alerts**” that must be reported to the FCC.

The questions that are perhaps the most interesting are those that ask whether EAS should be extended to “streaming services.” The initial question is just what is a “streaming service” that would be covered? The legislation defines such a service as “the ability of an application to play synchronized media streams like audio and video streams in a continuous way while those streams are being transmitted to the client over a data network.” But just what services would that include? The FCC also asks many technical issues as to whether streaming services have the ability to pass through EAS alerts, and whether those alerts would be ones like those that broadcasters convey (with audio messages) or just through text (like the wireless services provide). Practical issues are also asked. For instance, as most streaming services are national, can they possibly monitor all sources of EAS alerts in all the jurisdictions that they serve? And are they able to direct relevant messages to people in a given area, both on a technical level and without invading the privacy of those individuals?

Note that this is not the first time that the FCC has considered including Internet-based services in an EAS context. When the FCC adopted rules about false EAS alerts, there was language suggesting that even online services that used EAS alert tones for nonemergencies might be subject to FCC rules. See [our article here](#) for more information on that consideration. As online and broadcast services become more and more alike, it appears that questions as to whether they should be subject to similar regulatory obligations will be arising more and more often.

There are other issues that will be raised by this proceeding if it is adopted by the FCC at its upcoming open meeting. Broadcasters, streaming services, and others currently in the EAS universe, or with the potential of being included, should carefully review the proposals and weigh in on those that may affect your operations.

SUMMARY FROM DAVIS WRIGHT TREMAINE

Proposed EAS Rules Mark a Greater Role for New Media Platforms and Increased Importance for Social Media in Delivering EAS Alerts

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (“NPRM” or “Proposed EAS Rules”) in January, proposing improvements to the Emergency Alert System (“EAS”) and Wireless Emergency Alerts (“WEA”). The NPRM was published in the Federal Register March 24, marking the beginning of the comment period. The NPRM focuses on expanding EAS to new media platforms and social media to ensure that the public can receive emergency messages through these new sources in an “effective and accessible manner” that “minimizes burdens for stakeholders and safeguards these alerting systems against inherent vulnerabilities and attacks.” For example, the Commission is exploring expanding emergency alert procedures to include alternative alerting mechanisms through social media while being mindful of the potential for fraud and other malicious activity.

The NPRM focuses on the following four issues: (1) improving emergency alert processes at the state and local levels, (2) building effective community-based public safety exercises, (3) ensuring that alerting mechanisms leverage technology improvements, and (4) securing the Emergency Alert System against accidental misuse and malicious intrusion.

New Roles for Non-Broadcasters in the Proposed EAS Rules

The FCC is considering adding additional EAS designations to reflect changes in the alerting landscape. By way of background, EAS rules currently require EAS Participants (traditionally broadcasters, cable television systems, wireless cable systems, satellite digital audio radio service (SDARS) providers, and direct broadcast satellite (DBS) providers) to deliver alerts to the public and warn them of impending emergencies, and to monitor other stations that distribute these messages. The FCC created various EAS designations for stations and networks tasked with delivering messages from particular sources. For example, National Primary (NP) designated stations are the “primary entry point for Presidential messages delivered by FEMA... responsible for broadcasting a Presidential alert to the public[.]” Certain broadcast stations have been designated as “key” EAS sources.

In what has been historically a role for broadcasters, the FCC is now considering adding cable and satellite participants to the list of key EAS sources in this NPRM. The FCC is also considering updating EAS designations to add a category for cable and other Multichannel Video Programming Distributors (MVPDs). The FCC notes that these designations could result in additional EAS administration and monitoring burdens for the MVPD Participants.

(NOTE - The following paragraph is a result of comments made by WA-State Participants)

The way each EAS Participant operates is outlined in each state’s EAS Plan. The FCC proposes that state EAS Plans include a comprehensive list of procedures that state emergency management officials, local forecasting stations, and EAS Participants would then use to transmit emergency information to the public. Additionally, the FCC proposes that each state could modify its EAS Plan to include alternative alerting mechanisms such as the NPR Squawk Channel (an off-air frequency used to alert NPR radio stations to breaking news events) or the social media by which EAS Participants could deliver emergency messages in a reliable manner. Satellite technologies such as the NPR Squawk Channel generally are unaffected by natural disasters, which is why EAS Participants often resort to using these alternate technologies to deliver emergency messages. However, the FCC seeks comments on whether these alternate reporting mechanisms are sufficiently reliable to serve as primary or secondary EAS assignment for the Presidential Alert.

Community-Based Public Safety Exercises and Accessibility Requirements

The FCC also proposes amending its rules to authorize EAS Participants to conduct periodic EAS exercises using live code testing to simulate actual emergency situations in order to raise public awareness and to test EAS equipment. The NPRM highlights the need to target alert exercises to individuals with disabilities and/or with limited English proficiency, noting that these individuals are particularly vulnerable to being excluded from community preparedness initiatives. The FCC expects EAS Participants to take special care to ensure that live code testing does not confuse or mislead persons with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency, while testing preparedness for a real emergency situation and raising public awareness of emergency response resources.

Distribution of Emergency Alerts in Light of Technological Advances

Cable Providers

Wireless and digital cable service providers and wireline video providers may transmit EAS information by “force tuning” or automatically tuning the subscribers’ set top boxes (STBs) to a designated channel that carries the required message, thus effectively interrupting programming to transmit EAS alerts. However, this practice can sometimes result in channel “freeze” causing subscribers to be unable to navigate from the channel on which the EAS message is displayed for an extended period of time.

In view of the technological advances in STBs, the FCC asks whether “force tuning” rules should be reduced or eliminated. For example, if broadcast channels are already transmitting EAS messages, there may be no need to force tune a cable viewer to a different channel, particularly if “selective” force tuning is an option. Similarly, emergency information could be provided by crawls without the need to change channels. The widespread use of STBs and “smart” TVs could provide for greater user control, allowing subscribers to acknowledge receipt of EAS announcements and even provide user feedback. Social media crowdsourcing could be a valuable way of disseminating emergency information and improving the response to those emergencies. However, the FCC is also concerned about the possibility of abuse that could arise with increased user interaction.

The FCC also asks whether cable providers should be required to transmit EAS messages on channels that do not provide traditional video programming, such as those that provide data, interactive games or Internet access.

Tablets as “Mobile Devices”

In 2008, the FCC adopted rules allowing Commercial Mobile Service (CMS) providers to voluntarily deliver WEAs to subscribers’ mobile devices. The FCC’s WEA rules define a “mobile device” as “subscriber equipment generally offered by CMS Providers that supports the distribution of WEA Alert Messages.” That definition can omit tablet computers, many of which are not WEA capable. The FCC proposes designating tablets as “mobile devices” for the purpose of imposing WEA rules on participating CMS Providers whose devices are otherwise not WEA capable. The designation of tablets as “mobile devices” could create additional regulatory burdens for the tablet manufacturers.

Over-the-top (“OTT”) and EAS Alerts

The FCC also seeks comment whether over-the-top (“OTT”) EAS alerts are provided in a manner similar to the way alerts are provided via STBs and other traditional means or whether OTT alerts could be personalized to improve accessibility for the public, including individuals with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency. Ultimately, the FCC is interested in leveraging OTT to provide customizable EAS alerts, for example, via URLs or by allowing individual changes to the way audio and video alerts are displayed.

Security Risks Associated with EAS

Finally, the NPRM highlights the increase in security incidents with respect to EAS, and the need for improving security of EAS infrastructure and security measures. Describing several EAS security breaches, the FCC notes the lack of preparedness and shortcomings of EAS Participants’ approach to system security. In order to improve EAS security, the FCC proposes an annual certification requirement “that attests to performance of required security measures with a baseline security posture in four core areas,” as well as reporting of false alerts.

The FCC recognizes that sharing of such information could implicate confidentiality and cost issues, especially with respect to small entities.

Comments on the proposed rules are due on May 9, 2016 and reply comments are due on June 7, 2016.