

Revisions to Nationwide EAS Test Plans - Shorter Message and Changes in the FCC Handbook and Forms

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With less than a week to go before the first ever **Nationwide Test of the Emergency Alert System** ("EAS"), changes are being made for the November 9 test. In a [Public Notice released today](#), the FCC announced that the EAS message that will be conveyed will be only 30 seconds long, not the two or three minutes that were originally planned. There were some concerns expressed by certain groups, include groups representing cable television operators, that while the test was underway, certain automatic systems would kick in, overriding the visuals from the programming channel being broadcast. The automatic EAS alerts that would be transmitted in a textual format would not specifically say that they were being conveyed as part of a test. While the audio accompanying the test would provide that information, representatives of the hearing-impaired community were concerned that some people might believe that a real emergency was taking place. While the FCC and FEMA had initially indicated that a two or three minute test was necessary to make sure that the message could be conveyed throughout the whole daisy chain system and that the system would be capable of conveying a long message that might be necessary in the event of a real emergency, it appears that they have now agreed that a 30 second message will be sufficient, and less likely to start a "War of the Worlds" panic among those who don't hear the audio message from the test.

The EAS Handbook for this Nationwide test (which we wrote about last week, [here](#)) is supposed to be at the control point of all stations and has been revised to take into account the new length of the test. The revised handbook is available [here](#). Also, the Commission has made heard complaints about [Form 1 on its on-line reporting system](#) for this test, which we also wrote about last week. One complaint was that the form required information about the location of the station in geographical minutes in decimal format, not in the minutes and seconds as expressed on the face of FCC licenses and in most FCC databases. Many broadcasters had complained about that requirement - not knowing how to convert from minutes and seconds to minutes in a decimal format. In response to those complaints, the Form has been revised to provide a link to a decimal converter program - where you can put in the minutes and seconds as expressed on your license and get the decimal expression of the transmitter site location. Other minor changes in the form have also been made - including making some information (like a cell phone number for someone at the station) optional.

Broadcasters, cable operators, and others subject to the test should be getting prepared for next week, and making sure that their EAS equipment is properly installed and in operating condition. The FCC indicted in its Order requiring the Nationwide Test that it is using this test principally to learn about weaknesses in the system, not to penalize participants. So not receiving the test should not lead to any FCC enforcement action - that is the information that the FCC is seeking. But, should the failure not be due to a failure in the system, but instead because the EAS encoder/decoder at your stations was still in its box, or not plugged in, or not connected to an antenna, that might be a different story - as might the failure to file the necessary Form after the report, reporting on the results of the test. That report must be filed by December 24. So be ready, and be alert for any further updates which may come out of the FCC or FEMA in the next few days before the test.

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