

Comments of J. Eric Hoehn
District of Columbia 'State' EAS Chair
In
MM Docket 99-25
Low Power FM Service

These comments address only the Emergency Alert System requirements for a Low Power FM service, if adopted. Other comments by the same commenter will be filed separately, and will address other matters. These other comments will not be filed under the 'State' Chair position.

The FCC docket lists the following with regards to the Emergency Alert System:

87. Emergency Alert System. Since we expect LP1000 facilities to reach a significant number of people, we propose to treat them like full power FM stations for the purposes of the Emergency Alert System (EAS). In this way, we would expect to avoid having significant numbers of people deprived of this critical information resource. By contrast, due to their extremely small coverage areas and probably very small audiences, as well as their limited resources, we propose that microradio stations, if adopted, not be required to participate in the EAS. We request comment on these proposals. We also request commenters to address how LP100 stations, with their intermediate size and audience reach, should fit into the EAS structure.

It is the my belief that there are some short comings in the proposal, as well as some opportunities missed.

The FCC should not differentiate between one class of service and another with respect to alerting the public. This is because the public can not be expected to differentiate between the services. The public can not be expected to understand that listening to one station will inform them in the event of an emergency, while listening to one just two channels over on the dial may leave them with no warning of an impending disaster.

For this reason all FM broadcasts should have some minimal EAS capability. The FCC has a history of allowing small stations some flexibility in the fulfillment of their public safety responsibility. 10-watt class 'D' FM stations were required to have at least an EBS decoder in the days before EAS. In the event of an alert, the stations were to broadcast a message and leave the air so that the public could tune elsewhere for the emergency information.

A similar situation could exist for EAS. LP-1000 stations, if authorized will, according to paragraph 87 of the NPRM, have full EAS duties. I believe that LP-100 and micro-radio stations should have at least minimal EAS capabilities. I believe that LP-100 stations should have the same full EAS requirement, since in some places they may cover significant populations.

Small EAS decoding radios were demonstrated at the National Association of Broadcasters convention earlier in 1999. If each micro radio station were required to have an operational EAS decoder radio, the operators of these stations could take the same action class 'D' stations used to. An announcement could be given that there was an emergency and to tune to another station, followed by sign off. If the station chose, it could of course use a complete EAS equipment package and participate as a PN (Participating National) Station. (As part of this proceeding, Part 11 of the rules should be modified so that LPFM stations of a class that is not required to have a full EAS equipment package can not be used as part of any

state EAS Plan for relay purposes. Low power stations could only have the designation of PN if they intended to participate fully in EAS or NN (Non-Participating National) if they intend so leave the air after an appropriate announcement.

For automated stations, a simple solution exists. Most stations automating programming will likely be using some sort of computer assisted automation system, since they are common for automating programming. An audio signal from a suitable receiver could be connected to the audio input of a computer sound card. The card could have software running to implement EAS decoding, and upon decoding an EAS message, the automation system could either make an announcement and sign off the station, or repeat the EAS message periodically. This would insure an effective EAS system with minimal cost to the LPFM stations. Note that the above situations use non-type accepted equipment, to keep the cost down. The FCC should only insist that the equipment works properly when tested.... perhaps during the coordinated required Monthly tests.

It is also my opinion that even micro radio stations should have some EAS role. One use of micro radio, if authorized, might be a sort of 'special event station'. Contrary to the Commission's assumption in paragraph 87, a station in this role might not have a small audience. It might instead have a significant audience in a small venue. A significant number of people might be gathered at the same sporting event, concert or beach party, all tuned to a micro radio station set up for the event. If so it is imperative that the micro power station be prepared to relay an EAS message that might include a threat to the people at the event.

The small decoder radios will not need to be high cost, and in fact, the demand from micro radio stations might help 'bootstrap' the production of more and less expensive EAS decoder radios. These radios would also be available to the public for their use in homes, schools and businesses.

In short, because the public will not be able to differentiate between one class of radio stations and another, it is necessary that all stations, regardless of power, participate in some way in the EAS.

Respectfully Submitted

J. Eric Hoehn
D.C. 'State' EAS chair

July 27, 1999