



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
May 21, 2015

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Janice Wise (202) 418-8165
Email: janice.wise@fcc.gov

FCC TAKES ADDITIONAL STEPS TO MAKE EMERGENCY INFORMATION IN TV PROGRAMMING ACCESSIBLE TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission today adopted rules to ensure individuals who are blind or visually impaired can quickly access critical information shown on television in the event of an emergency. In addition, the Commission seeks comment on other possible accessibility issues facing those who are blind or visually impaired.

These additional steps implement provisions of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (“CVAA”) related to accessible emergency information. Congress passed the CVAA to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the modern and innovative communications technologies of the 21st Century.

The new rules adopted today require that emergency information be made accessible on a secondary audio stream on tablets, smartphones, laptops, and similar devices when subscription television providers, such as cable and satellite operators, permit consumers to access programming over their networks using an app on these devices. When emergency information appears on a television screen, it is preceded by three tones. Under previously adopted Commission rules, individuals who are blind or visually impaired soon will be able to switch to a secondary audio stream to hear televised emergency information when they hear the three tones. Today’s action takes this a step further: keeping pace with technological changes and the way consumers enjoy content.

Additionally, the Second Report and Order establishes rules requiring that the equipment used to receive and play back television programming, such as set-top boxes, have a simple and easy to use mechanism to switch from the main program audio to the secondary audio stream to hear audible emergency information.

Also adopted today was a Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that asks for comments on additional issues related to the accessibility of emergency information for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including:

- How to prioritize emergency information if there is more than one on-screen announcement;
- Whether information on school closings and school bus schedule changes should continue to be made available on the secondary audio stream; and
- Possible future requirements on multichannel video programming distributors to ensure that consumers have a simple and easy to use mechanism to access the secondary audio stream.

Action by the Commission May 21, 2015 by Second Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 15-56). Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn and Rosenworcel with Commissioners Pai and O’Rielly approving in part and dissenting in part. Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O’Rielly issuing statements.

-FCC-