



# PSHSBulletin

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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS: Nationwide EAS Test November 9, 2011 at 2 p.m. by Lisa Fowlkes



After two years of planning, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the National Weather Service (NWS) have announced that the first-ever nationwide, top-to-bottom test of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) will occur on November 9, 2011 at 2 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST).

PSHSB Chief Jamie Barnett, FEMA Assistant Administrator Damon Penn and NOAA/NWS Operational Systems Director Mark Paese made the announcement at the Commission's June 9, 2011 open meeting. The purpose of the test is to assess the reliability and effectiveness of the EAS as a mechanism to alert the public of emergencies.

In existence since 1994, the EAS is a media communications-based alerting system designed to transmit emergency alerts and warnings to the public at the national, state and local levels. Broadcasters, satellite radio and television service providers, cable television and wireline video service providers, all participate in the EAS. Each year, they transmit thousands of alerts and warnings to the public regarding weather threats, child abductions, and many other types of emergencies. EAS Participants provide a significant and largely unsung service to the nation by providing vital information in crises, and the system is designed to work when nothing else does. State and local

components of the EAS are tested on a monthly and weekly basis, respectively.

Although the EAS has been in existence for over 15 years, there has never been an end-to-end nationwide test of the system. We must know that the system will work as intended, should there ever be a need to send an alert to a large region of the United States or to the entire nation. Only a top-down, simultaneous test of all components of the EAS can provide an appropriate diagnosis of system-wide performance.

On November 9, 2011 at 2 p.m. EST, FEMA will trigger the EAS "cascade" architecture by transmitting the EAS code used for national level emergencies to the first level of broadcast stations in the national-level EAS, which in turn will rebroadcast the alert to the general public, as well as to the next level of EAS Participants monitoring them. This should continue through all levels of the system until the alert has been distributed throughout the entire country.

Although the National EAS Test may resemble the periodic monthly EAS tests familiar to most members of the public, there may be some differences in what viewers see. This is one reason for conducting a national EAS test. The audio message will be the same for all EAS Participants; however, due to limitations in the EAS, the video test message scroll may not be the same or indicate that "This is a test." This is due to the use of a "live" national code – the same code that would be used in an actual emergency. In addition, the background image that appears on video screens during an alert may indicate that "This is a test," but in some instances there might not be an image at all.

These types of limitations are exactly why FEMA and the FCC are planning to conduct outreach targeted at EAS Participants, government agencies and the public, including those with hearing disabilities, in preparation for the test. All EAS Participants must report back on the results of the test. FEMA and the FCC will study these results carefully to assess problems and, in coordination with EAS

stakeholders, devise remedies. We will likely conduct the test periodically to ensure that the EAS is, and remains, functional.

For more information about the nationwide test, please routinely visit PSHSB's website at <http://www.fcc.gov/public-safety-homeland-security-bureau>.

## FCC Releases Narrowbanding Waiver Guidance PN

by Zenji Nakazawa

If you were driving and encountered one of those yellow traffic signs that indicated the road ahead narrowed from three to two



lanes, would you: (a) ignore it, press the pedal to the metal and hope for the best, (b) wait until the very last moment and then cut in front of the next car inches before the guard barrier, or (c) start merging into traffic ahead of the road's narrowing?

The hypothetical situation is analogous to the imminent FCC narrowbanding requirement that all public safety and business industrial land mobile radio systems operating in the 150-174 MHz and 421-512 MHz (VHF/UHF) radio bands must cease operating using 25 kHz efficiency technology, and begin operating using at least 12.5 kHz efficiency technology, by January 1, 2013.

Currently, the majority of UHF and VHF land mobile radio licensees operate using 25 kHz efficiency technology. The continued operation and proliferation of these wideband systems has led to congestion in the UHF and VHF frequency bands. Limited spectrum is available for system expansion or implementation of new systems. This congestion problem, if not remedied, can pose dire consequences for the integrity of existing public safety systems, as well as the future evolution of public safety systems.

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## **FCC Releases Narrowbanding Waiver Guidance PN (cont'd.)**

by Zenji Nakazawa

Narrowbanding is an effort to ensure more efficient use of the VHF and UHF spectrum. The migration to 12.5 kHz efficiency technology will require licensees to operate more efficiently, either on narrower channel bandwidths or increased voice paths on existing channels. This will allow more users to take advantage of the additional channels that the FCC created within the same spectrum during the Refarming proceeding in the 1990s.

This policy should come as no surprise to licensees. The FCC first announced narrowbanding requirements in the mid-1990s, and in 2004, it set the January 1, 2013 deadline for migration to 12.5 kHz technology. In fact, many licensees have already completed the transition – that is, they have obeyed the “merging traffic” sign well in advance.

But many licensees still haven’t “merged” into the narrowband “lane,” and the January 1, 2013 deadline is approaching fast. On July 13, 2011, the Wireless Bureau, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, and the Office of Engineering Technology released a public notice (DA 11-1189), found at [http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily\\_Releases/Daily\\_Business/2011/db0713/DA-11-1189A1.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2011/db0713/DA-11-1189A1.pdf), as the FCC’s latest reminder of the deadline for licensees, frequency coordinators, equipment vendors, and other interested parties.

This public notice also provides guidance for licensees that may need to submit waiver requests because they face extraordinary circumstances in meeting the January 1, 2013 deadline. Specifically, the public notice sets out a number of discrete factors that will be relevant to the FCC in determining the merits of any request for waiver of the deadline. By providing this guidance publicly, our intent is to expedite the preparation and submission of waiver

requests by licensees. The public notice also clearly stresses that requests for waivers of the narrowbanding deadline will be subject to a high level of scrutiny under the waiver standard set forth in Section 1.925 of the Commission’s rules.

So, congratulations if you answered (c), to the pop traffic question. Like merging into traffic, narrowbanding requires licensees to plan ahead to avoid an accident. Failure for UHF and VHF licensees to narrowband can result in harmful interference to neighboring users, compromised operation of their own systems, and of course, potential forfeiture of license authorization, as well as enforcement penalties.

More information about the narrowbanding can be found by accessing the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau’s webpage at <http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/public-safety-spectrum/narrowbanding.html>.

### **Upcoming Event**

- August 9, 2011 - Open Commission Meeting, FCC Headquarters, Washington, DC

**For more information about the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau,** visit our webpage at <http://www.fcc.gov/public-safety-homeland-security-bureau> or email us at [pshsinfo@fcc.gov](mailto:pshsinfo@fcc.gov).

**Questions or Comments?** Email your questions or comments concerning the content of this bulletin to Kim Anderson ([kim.anderson@fcc.gov](mailto:kim.anderson@fcc.gov)).