



Emergency Alert System (EAS)

What is the Emergency Alert System (EAS)?

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is a national public warning system that requires broadcasters, cable television systems, wireless cable systems, satellite digital audio radio service (SDARS) providers and direct broadcast satellite (DBS) providers to provide the President with communications capability to address the American people within 10 minutes during a national emergency. The system also may be used by state and local authorities, in cooperation with the broadcast community, to deliver important emergency information, such as weather information, AMBER alerts and local incident information targeted to specific areas.

FEMA, in partnership with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is responsible for implementation, maintenance and operations of the EAS at the federal level. The President has sole responsibility for determining when the national level EAS will be activated. FEMA is responsible for national-level EAS, tests, and exercises.

EAS Modernization and Primary Entry Point (PEP) Stations

The modernization of the EAS begins with the FEMA adoption of a new digital standard for the distribution of alert messages to the broadcast community. The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) uses the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) standard and new distribution methods to make the EAS more resilient and to provide enhanced alerting capabilities.

Primary Entry Point (PEP) stations are broadcast stations located throughout the country with a direct connection to FEMA and resilient transmission capabilities. These stations provide the initial broadcast of a Presidential EAS message. FEMA increased the number of PEP facilities to provide direct coverage to over 90 percent of the American people.

History of the Emergency Alert System (EAS)

In 1951, the CONtrol of ELeCtromagnetic RADiation, originally called the “Key Station System” or CONELRAD, initiated a special sequence and procedure on participating stations tuned to 640 & 1240 kHz AM which was designed to warn citizens. In 1963, the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) was initiated to address the nation through audible alerts. It did not allow for targeted messaging. EBS upgraded in 1976 to provide for better and more accurate handling of alert receptions. During this time, EBS was expanded for use during peacetime at state and local levels. In 1997, the Emergency Alert System (EAS) was designed for the President to speak to the American people within 10 minutes of a national emergency. EAS messages are composed of a digitally encoded header, attention signal, audio announcement and digitally encoded end-of-message marker.

The EAS Remains a Critical Component of IPAWS

In 2006, President Bush signed Executive Order 13407 directing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create a comprehensive public alert and warning system for the United States. FEMA was directed to lead the effort and adopted a set of standards and protocols which support IPAWS. IPAWS is a modernization and integration of the nation’s existing and future alert and warning systems, technologies and infrastructure. Federal, state, territorial, tribal and local government alert and warning systems are able to integrate with the national alert and warning infrastructure providing a broader range of message options and communications pathways for the delivery of alert and warning information to the American people before, during, and after a disaster by providing one message over more media to more people for the preservation of life and property.