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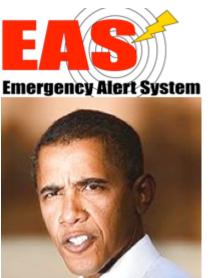Written by **Raven Clabough** on February 8, 2011

FCC Working on Presidency Alert Emergency Tests

The White House has announced that it plans to make a change to the regularly scheduled Emergency Alert System (EAS) tests that declare, ?This is a test?this is ONLY a test.? According to the Federal Communications Commission, the tests will soon include presidential announcements.

The FCC explains of the alert system:

> The EAS is a national alert and warning system established to enable the President of the United States to address the American public during emergencies. Governors and state and local emergency authorities also use it-on a voluntary basis-to issue more localized emergency alerts. Under the FCCs rules, broadcasters, cable operators, Satellite Digital Audio Radio Service providers, Direct Broadcast Satellite service providers and wireline video service providers are required to receive and transmit Presidential EAS messages to the public.

The EAS has never been used to deliver presidential alerts, until now. By 2009, the Federal Partners-the FCC, Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Weather Service, and the Executive Office of the President (EOP)-began to plan the first-ever national test:

> As part of this effort, on January 6, 2010 and January 26, 2011, FEMA along with the State of Alaska and the Alaska Broadcasters Association, conducted two "live code" tests of the Presidential EAS within Alaska. A "live code" test uses the same codes that would be used during an actual activation of the Presidential EAS. The Federal Partners are using the results nad lessons learned from these tests to complete a test plan for the first ever National EAS test.

The FCC released a press release explaining the plans for the National test:

> The FCC voted unanimously to adopt a Third Report and Order that sets forth rules that will faciliate the federal government's efforts to conduct a national EAS test by transmitting a Presidential Alert from Washington, D.C. to television and radio broadcasters, cable systems and satellite service providers who will then deliver the alert to the American public.

Deputy chief of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau of the FCC explains the premise of the presidential alerts:

> The primary goal is to provide the President with a mechanism to communicate with the American public during times of national emergency. The change is that prior to last weeks order there was

no rule in place to call for or allow a test from top to bottom. Theres never been a test from top to bottom where its issued by FEMA and it goes straight down to all the different levels of EAS to the American public. So this is a way for us to glean, okay, if there was an actual emergency and the federal government needed to activate the Presidential EAS, making sure that it actually works the way its designed to.

The issues with which the FCC must now contend include hammering out the timing of the test and reassuring the public that the tests are simply tests and not true emergencies.

Fowlkes emphasizes the necessity of testing the system. We want to make sure that it works the way its designed to. If there are things that work well, great. If there are things that dont work well, we can work with EAS participants and with state and local governments as well as our federal partners to correct or improve what doesnt work.

The Federal News Radio reports that the FCC is also looking into using wireless broadband to enhance the Emergency Alert System. The idea is to leverage broadband and the Internet for emergency alerting with the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) being developed by FEMA and the wireless industry.

Under CMAS, three types of text message or wireless alerts would be sent:

- **Presidential Alerts**– "Which would be the same as what the president might issue or FEMA might issue through the EAS system,
- **Imminent Threat Alerts**– Which Fowlkes said would warn when "there's a hurricane coming or a tornado coming," and then the
- **Child Abduction Emergency/AMBER Alerts**– Alerts related to missing or endangered children due to an abduction or runaway situation

The program is set to be deployed by April 2012.

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