Suzanne Goucher, President & CEO, Maine Association of Broadcasters
Chair, Maine State Emergency Communications Committee
Co-Chair, Joint National Association of Broadcasters-National Alliance of State Broadcasters Associations (NAB-NASBA) EAS Committee

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Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

Communicating With the Public During Emergencies: An Update on Federal Alert and Warning Efforts

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Good morning, Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Richardson, Members of the Committee. My name is Suzanne Goucher. Since 1994 I have been the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Maine Association of Broadcasters. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the valuable, often life-saving services that full power local radio and television stations provide during natural disasters and other crises.

As discussed in detail below, local broadcasters are the most important source of vital emergency information for all Americans. In addition, local radio and television stations serve as the backbone of this nation's Emergency Alert System (EAS). I am pleased to share with you today the views of Maine's broadcasters about how to improve our emergency communications system in the digital age.

To date, much of the discussion related to emergency communications has concerned improving interoperability among fire, police, and other public safety authorities and emergency operations; namely, the ability of these various authorities to communicate with one another during a disaster. While broadcasters support this laudable goal, we also believe the time is ripe to expand the conversation to include improved emergency notification to the public. To a significant degree, interoperability and public alerting go hand-in-hand, such that the success of each depends partly on the success of the other. For example, the lessons learned during 9/11 demonstrate that improved emergency communications among public safety officials certainly would have improved the critical, life-saving information that could have been shared with the public. Below, I will focus my remarks on public alerting, and our efforts in Maine to improve emergency notification to the public.

I. Broadcasting Is the Most Important Source for Critical, Life-Saving Emergency Information for All Americans

Broadcasters' commitment to public service is never more apparent than during times of crisis. During an emergency -- particularly one that arises with little notice -- no other industry can match the ability of full power broadcasting to deliver comprehensive, up-to-date warnings and information to affected citizens. Local television broadcasters reach 99% of the approximate 116 million households in the U.S., while local radio reaches an audience of more than 243 million

Americans on a weekly basis. The wide signal coverage of broadcasters ensures that anyone in a car, at home or even walking around with a mobile device can receive up-to-the-minute alerts when disaster strikes. As a ubiquitous medium, broadcasters understand and appreciate their unique role in disseminating emergency information. Radio and television broadcasters are first informers during an emergency, and Americans know to turn to their local broadcasters first for in-depth coverage.

Radio and television stations are also our nation's most reliable network for distributing emergency information. Even if the electricity is out, causing the Internet and cable television to go down, and phone service is lost because networks are clogged or cell towers or phone lines are down, free, over-the-air broadcasters can still be on the air. Our dedicated news and weather personnel use their familiarity with the people and geography of their local communities to provide the most useful, informative news to their audiences, whether that includes information on where to shelter-in-place, or which streets will serve as evacuation routes, or where local businesses may find fuel or generators.

Broadcasters deliver emergency information with passion. Let me give you some recent examples. In May of this year, in the town of Joplin, Missouri, local radio station KZRG began wall-to-wall coverage an hour and a half before the unprecedented tornado devastated this area.[1] Immediately after the tornado, cell phones, the Internet and landline telephones went down. KZRG's one-story office building remained standing. Zimmer Radio, which owns KZRG and five other stations in Joplin, consolidated multiple broadcasts into a single feed of nonstop disaster coverage.[2] Music announcers and talk show hosts transformed into on-air first responders and informers.[3] Employees drove to the station immediately after the tornado in order to provide information on medical assistance, to help locating missing family members, and to direct residents as to where they could buy gas and groceries.[4] Seven of Zimmer Radio's staffers had lost their homes, but still they reported for duty to help their neighbors.[5] In nearby Springfield, Missouri, Clear Channel's five radio stations collected nearly 50,000 pounds of food and $20,000 of cash for Joplin victims from listeners.[6]

A month after the Joplin tornado, flooding in Minot, North Dakota, has sent hundreds fleeing from their homes. Residents turned to local broadcast television stations for current information. One station, KXMC, has been replaying coverage of the floods over and over at the request of residents who want to see what is left of their neighborhoods. And as *The New York Times* said in an article last week, when the station "has not been showing viewers their submerged homes, it has been broadcasting news conferences, explaining the intricacies of dike construction and sharing viewer photos from around the town."[7]

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[1] Moni Basu, "Radio Stations Chug Along 24/7 in tornado-devastated Joplin," *CNN* (May 24, 2011).
[2] Matt Pearce, "Joplin Radio Stations Become a Lifeline for Tornado-Stricken Residents," *L.A. Times* (May 25, 2011).
[3] *Id.*
[4] Doug Lung, "Broadcasters Inform Citizens During Weather Emergencies," *TV Technology* (May 26, 2011).
[5] "Radio's Multi-Platform Reach Informs, Alerts Joplin, MO Tornado Victims," *All Access* (May 25, 2011).
[6] "Radio Beams Regional Tornado Relief Message," *Inside Radio* (May 27, 2011).
[7] Brian Stelter, "This Just In: How Your House Is Faring," *The New York Times* (June 27, 2011).

Additionally, as a devastating storm developed near Springfield, Massachusetts, last month, all three local broadcast television stations went wall-to-wall with coverage. In an area not used to tornadoes, the stations captured dramatic images – including those from sky-cams of the tornado whipping up water from the Connecticut River – and broadcasting them to viewers. Following the storm, the stations continued to report on the damage and recovery and provided information on relief and food supplies.[8] And the four local radio stations cut all music and gave continuous news updates, including live phone calls from the Governor and the head of the Red Cross. The news director and an announcer also took calls from dozens of listeners looking for information on what to do and where to go.[9]

Local stations also offer hyper local weather alerts and information on multicast channels. TV stations are in the process of rolling out innovative mobile DTV services, which will enable viewers to receive live, local broadcast television programming—including local news, weather, sports, emergency information, and entertainment programming—on an "on the go" basis on mobile-DTV capable devices such as smart phones, laptop computers and tablets. Over 70 stations in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere around the country have commenced offering mobile DTV service, and hundreds of other stations have announced plans to continue the nationwide roll-out of mobile DTV in the near-term. Mobile DTV is a reliable and spectrally efficient (one-to-an-unlimited-number) means of disseminating emergency information to viewers. Following the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan, residents reported that the country's mobile television service was a lifeline source of information, particularly in the wake of cellular network and power outages.[10]

In times of local crisis such as these, broadcasters provide astounding service to their communities.

Beyond anecdotal evidence, statistics paint a vivid picture of the power that the broadcast medium has to save lives. Following tornadoes that struck in Alabama in late April, Raycom Media conducted a survey of residents who were impacted. According to the survey results, a vast majority – 71% of adults – said they were warned about the storm by watching television.[11] An additional 10% of those surveyed learned of the tornadoes via radio. A mere 6% of respondents learned of the tornadoes through Internet, smartphones, or Twitter/Facebook.[12] This occurred despite the fact that 75% of those interviewed were at home during the tornadoes, presumably with access to the Internet and other sources of information.[13] This reliance on radio and television for dependable, up-to-the-minute information was true even for young citizens

[8] Scott Fybush, "Radio, TV React to Mass. Tornadoes," *NorthEast Radio Watch* (June 6, 2011).
[9] "CC Cluster in MA. Superserves During Last Week's Tornado," *Radio Ink (*June 7, 2011).
[10] *See, e.g.*, Michael Plugh, "What I Left Behind In Japan," *Salon.com* (March 22, 2011), *available at* http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2011/03/22/japan_i_left_behind/index.html. *See also* Live Blog: Japan Earthquake, *The Wall Street Journal* (March 11, 2011, 8:06 a.m. posting of Chester Dawson) ("Unable to use cell phones, many used their smartphones to tune into television broadcasts and find out what had happened. 'It's very convenient being able to watch live TV when the phones are down,' said Minori Naito, an employee of Royal Bank of Scotland in Tokyo. 'Otherwise, we'd have no idea what is going on.'").
[11] Alabama Tornado Survey, Billy McDowell, VP of Media Research, RAYCOM Media (May 2011).
[12] *Id.*
[13] *Id.*

ages 18 to 24. We might expect this demographic to rely more on the internet and social media for information, but fully 77% of them reported that they tracked the storms via radio or TV.[14]

And there are many more examples. Broadcast stations continue to provide emergency information and other services even though the costs -- in overtime for personnel, in meals and hotels, in equipment, and of course in advertising lost due to providing wall-to-wall news and information coverage -- are substantial. For example, one station reports that a single season's hurricane coverage cost $160,000 *before* accounting for lost advertising revenue.[15] Another station reports that it lost 50 percent of its revenue for an entire month following the events of September 11, 2001, because its intensive news programming preempted so much of its normal programming.[16] Emergency journalism clearly requires the commitment of substantial resources from the nation's local broadcasters.

II. Local Broadcast Stations Remain the Backbone of the Nation's Emergency Alert System

In addition to the ongoing, comprehensive coverage that broadcasters provide during emergencies, we are also the backbone of the Emergency Alert System (EAS). EAS is a largely wireless network that connects over-the-air radio, television and cable television systems. The in-place infrastructure of EAS allows the prompt dissemination of alerts to the widest possible audience, or to target alerts to specific areas, as appropriate. EAS is intended for use during sudden, unpredictable or unforeseen events that pose an immediate threat to public health or safety, the nature of which precludes any advance notification or warning.

Under EAS, local broadcasters put their facilities and their airwaves at the disposal of government authorities to transmit life-saving emergency warnings. EAS can be accessed or triggered by the President, Governors and local authorities under certain conditions. Most alerts are originated by the local and regional offices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS). Broadcasters typically work in

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[14] 2010 was also a critical year for local broadcasters and the communities they served. For example, in early May of 2010, as record rainfall hammered the state of Tennessee, every local news station in Nashville preempted regular programming in favor of continuous, commercial-free weather event content for almost an entire weekend. Local radio stations provided constant weather alerts. During the flooding, Dennis Banka of WUCZ in Carthage, Tennessee, managed to single-handedly keep his station on the air for almost 48 hours straight for the benefit of local listeners in need. Mr. Banka and his station had vital contacts with emergency personnel and other authorities and were able to report critical information about the known instabilities of two local dams in a timely manner. Here in Washington, during the blizzards that hit the East Coast in 2010, broadcasters provided up-to-the-minute information that was critical to affected residents. For instance, Washington, D.C. station WRC-TV's wall-to-wall coverage and "potentially life-saving newscasts" were lauded by Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski. John Eggerton, "As the Snowy World Turns," *Broadcasting & Cable* (Feb. 10, 2010). As Federal Communications Chairman (FCC) Chairman Genachowski observed, "Not only were local broadcasters a lifeline for the community, WRC-TV used its robust Web site and Twitter feed to help residents who had lost power get up-to-the-minute information through their computers and phones." Prepared Remarks of Chairman Julius Genachowski, NAB Show 2010, Las Vegas, Nevada, at 2 (April 13, 2010).

[15] *The Economic Realities of Local Television News – 2010: A Report for the National Association of Broadcasters* (April 2010) at 24, attached to Comments of the National Association of Broadcasters, Examination of the Future of Media and Information Needs of Communities in a Digital Age, GN Docket No. 10-25 (filed May 7, 2010).

[16] *Id*. at 24.

partnership with state, county and local emergency managers and public safety officials on how best to deploy EAS.

The content of EAS messages can vary depending on the nature of the emergency, but may include information on evacuation plans and routes, shelter-in-place instructions, storm paths, and America's Missing: Broadcasting Emergency Response Alerts, or Child Abduction AMBER Alerts, which help expand the eyes and ears of local law enforcement when a child is abducted. Nationwide, since the inception of AMBER in 1996, AMBER alerts have helped safely recover more than 523 abducted children.[17] In fact, the Amber Plan was originally created by broadcasters with the assistance of law enforcement agencies in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Clearly, EAS participation is an important component of broadcasters' public service. Although participation in EAS on a local level is technically voluntary, virtually all radio and television stations participate, and do so proudly. All EAS equipment is purchased by broadcasters at their own expense. All stations must test their EAS systems on both a weekly and monthly basis. We have all seen or heard the familiar announcement: "The following is a test of the Emergency Alert System. This is only a test."

In January 2010, and again in January 2011, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) jointly conducted statewide tests of the EAS in Alaska.[18] Radio and television stations in Alaska coordinated closely with federal and local authorities in Alaska to help ensure the success of these tests. Their efforts included a comprehensive public awareness campaign that provided Alaskans with repeated advance notice of the statewide EAS tests, and helped to prevent any undue surprise or confusion.

Building upon the lessons learned in the Alaska tests, the FCC and FEMA announced that they would conduct a nationwide test of the EAS system on November 9, 2011.[19] The broadcast industry supports this national EAS testing. We are committed to working with our federal and local partners to ensure that the national test is useful and informative. Broadcasters are also preparing for the national exercise by reviewing their internal EAS equipment and processes, and if appropriate, upgrading software or hardware in advance of the national test.

Although broadcasters provide EAS and in-depth emergency information as part of their service to the public, and do so enthusiastically, participating in a reliable, functional EAS is not without certain challenges. For example, in June 2006, President Bush issued Executive Order 13407, entitled *Public Alert and Warning System*, which states:

> It is the policy of the United States to have an effective, reliable, integrated, flexible, and comprehensive system to alert and warn the American people…establish or adopt, as appropriate, common alerting and warning

[17] *See* http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PageServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=2810#2 (last visited June 28, 2011).
[18] *See, e.g.*, *Alaska Plans EAS Test Using EAN Code*, Radio Magazine (Dec. 31.2009), available at http://radiomagonline.com/studio_audio/EAS/alaska_ean_test_1231.
[19] *See Public Notice*, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau Announces That First Ever Nationwide Diagnostic Test of the Emergency Alert System Will Occur On November 9, 2011 at 2 PM EST, EB Docket No. 04-296, rel. June 9, 2011.

> protocols, standards, terminology, and operating procedures for the public alert and warning system to enable interoperability and the secure delivery of coordinated messages to the American people through as many communication pathways as practicable…administer the Emergency Alert System (EAS) as a critical component…ensure that under all conditions the President of the United States can alert and warn the American people.

In response, FEMA has served as the lead federal agency for developing this program, called the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Program. Among other things, IPAWS is designed to improve public safety through the rapid dissemination of emergency messages to as many people as possible over as many communications devices as possible. To do this, FEMA's IPAWS program is planning to expand the traditional EAS to include additional technologies, to capitalize on recent shifts in how many Americans consume information. IPAWS will enable Federal, State, territorial, tribal, and local emergency communication officials to access multiple broadcast and other communications pathways for the purpose of creating and activating alert and warning messages related to any hazard impacting public safety and well-being. Broadcasters are working closely with FEMA to ensure that EAS via free, over-the-air television and radio remains the essential backbone of the next generation of EAS and public alerting.

Broadcasters are also leveraging social media and other message pathways to broaden dissemination of alert messages. When you receive an emergency alert via email, text message, or Facebook from your local radio or TV station, you know you're receiving reliable information from an authoritative source.

In Maine, and nationwide, radio and television stations do a commendable job assisting public safety officials in disseminating emergency information, whether through our on-air news programming, or through EAS. Regarding the latter, we fully intend to continue our efforts to devote personnel and attention to making sure that our internal EAS systems work properly. However, the ongoing reliability of the EAS network will depend on the success of several important developments.

First, the success of EAS will largely turn on the expertise and ability of local authorities to fully deploy EAS and act as a "civil authority" with full access to the system. In the past, some of the isolated instances where EAS could have been used more judiciously directly resulted from a lack of awareness or expertise on the part of local officials concerning EAS. In this day and age, it is unacceptable that some local emergency managers remain unaware of the benefits of EAS, or how and when to trigger an EAS alert. Clearly, many state and local authorities need additional training on the proper use of EAS and the proper crafting of alert messages. At present, the only training they receive is the technical manual that comes with an EAS encoder-decoder. FEMA is taking steps to address this vacuum by creating a training and certification program for users of the system. We applaud this initiative.[20]

Second, as mentioned above, FEMA is in the midst of implementing a next generation of EAS. This new system will modernize the technology used to deliver EAS messages from public

[20] To this end, it is critical that IPAWS continues to receive full funding through the authorization and budgetary process to achieve and maintain its public alerting missions.

safety officials to EAS Participants. Under the Commission's existing rules, broadcasters and other EAS Participants are required to process an EAS message that is formatted in this new "language," known as the Common Alert Protocol (CAP).[21]

The FCC is in the process of reviewing its EAS Rules, including whether to extend the current September 30, 2011 deadline for all EAS Participants to install equipment capable of receiving a CAP-formatted message.[22] This will be a substantial burden for a number of broadcasters, as it will require the replacement of EAS equipment at most radio and television stations. The costs of such equipment are not insignificant, particularly to small radio and television stations,[23]still struggling from the recent severe recession. It is critical that, as Participants are required to upgrade their equipment to *receive* a CAP-formatted message, local and state jurisdictions have proper funding and training to be able to *transmit* a CAP-formatted message.[24] This will ensure that the public will benefit from the next-generation of public alerting.

Third, authority for EAS is spread across multiple federal agencies with differing priorities, while the primary use of the system is by state and local officials. At present, there is no mechanism for the users of the system and the distributors of the messages to come together to discuss issues and work out problems. I respectfully request the Committee to consider adopting language creating a national EAS Working Group, and directing it to meet on a regular basis and report back to this and other committees of jurisdiction, to ensure that the lines of communication remain open and that ideas for continuous improvement of the system have a forum in which they can be heard.

One other critical improvement can be achieved without expenditure of any funds. Specifically, broadcasters need credentialing from state and local authorities to allow them to access their facilities, such as studios and transmitter sites, during times of emergency. This will enable radio and television stations to repair or maintain their equipment and fully leverage their resources, local knowledge and training to keep the public informed during emergencies. While certain states accommodate broadcasters who need to access their facilities, such cooperation is not universal. Congressional action in this area could greatly enhance our ability to maintain operations and deliver vital information to our audiences.

Finally, in Maine, we are undertaking an effort to substantially improve and modernize our emergency notification plan. Under this "perfect" notification plan, a managed "system-of-systems" would be created through which multiple systems would work together to deliver more alerts and warnings more securely, faster, and to more people. This statewide program would be designed to take advantage of existing investments and future initiatives, including a modernized EAS system, and would be poised for connection to any national system that is developed. At

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[21] CAP is a messaging structure that allows emergency managers to provide in a digital format (protocol) detailed descriptions of an emergency event. It is an open, interoperable standard. *See Second Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd. 13285 ¶¶ 22-25 (2007). CAP is also backwards-compatible to work with EAS and the NWS' SAME (Specific Area Message Encoding) protocol. *Id*. at ¶ 5.

[22] *See*, In the Matter of Review of the Emergency Alert System; Independent Spanish Broadcasters Association, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc., and the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council, Petition for Immediate Relief, *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, EB Docket No. 04-296, rel. May 26, 2011.

[23] The cost for new CAP-compliant EAS equipment ranges from $1,200 to over $3,000 per facility.

the same time, however, the plan would maintain primary responsibility for alerting at the local level and would include the ability to target alerts geographically.

The goal of this Maine statewide notification program would be to deliver alerts and warnings throughout the state with sufficient capability and speed, in advance of pending disasters, to help prevent loss of life and property. The program would be consistent with state and federal initiatives and standards. This program will also require funding. These funds would be used to create and manage the program, facilitate collaboration, develop operational and governance guidelines and training, purchase technology, and conduct public outreach. Maine has recently undergone its third round of budget-cutting in the past six months. The state cupboard is bare, and a large question looms: How will the state pay for the system it needs to take advantage of these new technologies?

A properly working EAS is a fundamental and essential component of our nation's Homeland Security. It is crucially needed in our state of Maine to respond to the myriad of potential man-made and weather-related threats facing our region. One of the 9-11 terrorists began his fateful trip at the airport in Portland, Maine, on his way to Boston. We share a long, rural border with Canada that is difficult to secure. We have a large oil depot in South Portland that provides our winter heating supply. Bath Iron Works is a primary defense contractor to the U.S. Navy. The Seabrook nuclear power plant sits just 15 miles below our southwestern border. And we are experiencing seemingly more severe weather events in recent years, including 25 tornado warnings between 2009 and last week, which have resulted in 15 confirmed tornado touch-downs. Even in a small, rural state like Maine, a hardened, fully capable alerting system is necessary to ensure the safety of our citizens and our infrastructure.

Maine is grateful to Chairman Bilirakis and this Committee for hosting this hearing and for your interest in improving our communications to prevent the loss of life and property in the future. As we continue to discuss damage estimates, disaster-related costs, and rebuilding our communities after the recent severe floods, tornadoes and wildfires around the U.S., we must take care not to overlook this opportunity to improve public warning and emergency communications in advance of the next event, instead of during its aftermath. We should be planning for the next emergency, not preparing for the last one.

Thank you.