

First Nationwide Emergency Alert System Test Planned

On Nov. 9 at 2 p.m. Eastern time, the first nationwide test of the Emergency Alert System will take place, lasting up to three and a half minutes.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Communications Commission together will conduct the first nationwide test of the Emergency Alert System on Nov. 9 at 2 p.m. Eastern time. The test may last up to three and a half minutes, FEMA announced.

The test will involve broadcast radio and television stations, cable TV, satellite radio and TV services, and wire-line video service providers in all states and the territories of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.

What the public will hear Nov. 9 is a "this is a test" message. FCC's rules require radio and TV broadcasters, cable operators, satellite digital audio radio service providers, direct broadcast satellite service providers, and wire-line video service providers to receive and transmit presidential EAS messages to the public. The two agencies said this test will help the federal partners and EAS participants determine the reliability of the system and its effectiveness at notifying the public.

"A national test of our Emergency Alert System, with the vital communications support and involvement of participants, is a step towards ensuring that the alert and warning community is prepared to deliver critical information that can help save lives and protect property," said Damon Penn, FEMA's assistant administrator of National Continuity Programs. "Because there has never been an activation of the Emergency Alert System on a national level, FEMA views this test as an excellent opportunity to assess the readiness and effectiveness of the current system. It is important to remember that this is not a pass-or-fail test, but a chance to establish a baseline for making incremental improvements to the Emergency Alert System with ongoing and future testing. It is also important to remember that the Emergency Alert System is one of many tools in our communications toolbox, and we will continue to work on additional channels that can be a lifeline of information for people during an emergency."

"The upcoming national test is critical to ensuring that the EAS works as designed," said Jamie Barnett, chief of FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau. "As recent disasters here at home and in Japan have reminded us, a reliable and effective emergency alert and warning system is key to ensuring the public's safety during times of emergency. We look forward to working with FEMA in preparation for this important test."