

FCC's Text to Speech Rule Takes Effect November 30, 2015

November 20, 2015

A reminder that the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Text to Speech (TTS) rule (also known as the "Audible Crawl" rule) takes effect on Monday, November 30, 2015. The TTS rule requires television broadcast stations and multichannel video programming distributors (MVPDs) that disseminate *emergency information* visually outside of newscasts (whether regularly scheduled newscasts or newscasts that interrupt regular programming) to provide the same information aurally on a secondary audio stream (SAP channel). If your station provides visual emergency information (for example, in a crawl or lower third graphic) outside of newscasts, by November 30, you must have activated at least one SAP channel.

The FCC also requires an aural tone (usually a three second tone sound) on the *main* audio stream when emergency information is displayed, which now will alert individuals to switch to the secondary audio stream. Additionally, the rule requires an aural tone on the *secondary* audio stream, followed by at least two aural presentations of the emergency information. Emergency information will take priority over all other content on the secondary audio stream.

The FCC has provided only broad guidance as to what qualifies as "emergency information," indicating that it is "information about an emergency intended to further the protection of life, health, safety, and property." This includes, but is not limited to: tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, tidal waves, earthquakes, icing conditions, heavy snows, widespread fires, discharge of toxic gases, widespread power failures, industrial explosions, civil disorders, school closings and changes in school bus schedules resulting from such conditions, and warnings and watches of impending changes in weather. Note, however, that stations and MVPDs need not provide audio pertaining

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to school closings on the SAP channel.

Given existing visual and aural requirements, television stations and MVPDs are not required to provide TTS for emergency alerts delivered using EAS or for regularly scheduled tests of the EAS system. If a station chooses not to broadcast an EAS-provided message (for example, an Amber alert) in the EAS format, but instead chooses to present it as emergency information contained in a crawl or graphic (again, outside of newscast), then the station must provide the information using TTS.

Please let Kathy Kirby or Joan Stewart know if you have any questions about the Audible Crawl rule.