



FEMA



***“Updating the Cold War Emergency Alert for a
Networked, Digital America”***

**John Lawson
President and CEO
Association of Public Television Stations
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Good morning.

I am pleased to join White House Homeland Security Adviser Rapuano, and FEMA Director Paulison in announcing our partnership this morning.

It is truly my honor to be here with you.

I'd also like to acknowledge my friend and colleague, Paula Kerger, the President and CEO of PBS.

I am John Lawson, President and CEO of the Association of Public Television Stations, and I thank each of you (audience) for joining us for this great occasion. The partnership between APTS and the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA that we are announcing today is a major step forward in providing timely alerts and warning to the American public in times of emergency. On behalf of APTS, PBS and the 175 local public television stations, I want to express how honored we are that the Department has chosen to partner with us to provide the backbone for the next generation Digital Emergency Alert System.

Today, we are laying the foundation for a new generation alert and warning system for the American public. The current EAS has its roots in the Cold War, and still relies on technology from that era. You had to be watching one of the three major networks or listening to a radio station to have a chance of receiving the alert. What we are announcing today is an alert system for the mobile, networked, and digital America of the 21st Century.

Digital public television stations are poised to embrace the promises of digital broadcast technology to advance the public safety mission that we have embraced since our beginnings in the analog world. Public television stations operate 356 transmitters and over 700 translators across the country. They are 100 percent interconnected via the PBS satellite network, and reach 99 percent of the US population.

Thanks to decades of investment by local communities and state and the federal government, public television stations have the national digital infrastructure in-place today to provide a dual use backbone for this next generation of the Emergency Alert System. The Department of Homeland Security has embraced this infrastructure as a classic “dual use” opportunity.

In addition to the exciting offerings of high definition programming and multicasting program streams, digital television offers the reality of a new wireless data delivery system called “datacasting.” With datacasting, information in the universal Internet Protocol format is embedded into a public television station’s digital broadcast signal and transmitted wirelessly across a large geographic area. Using just a fraction of our over-the-air digital bandwidth, stations can transmit critical data, including computer files, digital audio and video files, and graphics, simultaneously with television programming.

Through the partnership we are announcing today, public television stations will become the last mile delivery system for emergency alerts and warnings issued by the President during a time of crisis. These messages will be received by DTV receivers located at State emergency operations centers, television and radio stations, cable headends and, eventually, at headends for other wireless communication networks throughout the country.

Beyond Presidential messaging, our system creates a foundation for alerts that originate at the state and local level. For example, State emergency managers, depending on the needs of the situation, could use public television datacasting to simultaneously transmit information to media organizations, public safety agencies, schools, and hospitals for emergency, educational, and medical uses.

Datacasting is completely scaleable and is bottleneck – free. This is critical, as it avoids the communications congestion that caused so many problems during 9/11. Just as with broadcasting to television receivers, the digital information can be received by one end-user or one million end-users without fear of overload.

The partnership between APTS and the Department began in October 2004 when we launched a pilot project in the National Capital Region. Over the past two years, the pilot provided a proof of performance of the ability of public television stations to use datacasting as part of the backbone of a national emergency alert and warning system. In addition to FEMA, the FCC and NOAA participated in the pilot.

APTS is also joined in the pilot by PBS and public television stations WETA in Arlington, and twenty-five other public television stations across the country. APTS has numerous other partners in the commercial television, cable, cellular, paging, and radio industries.

In a few moments, with our technical contractor, SpectraRep, we are going to demonstrate for you the capabilities of our digital alert and warning system. I ask you to turn your attention to this plasma screen. On it, you see a schematic of how the system will operate.

First, on the far left, you see the logo representing the Department. In a few moments, an official at FEMA headquarters will send a test alert to PBS over a secure connection. PBS will then uplink to their satellite and it will be received by WETA and other public television stations across the country. WETA will then datacast the message on their DTV transmitter, and it will be received over the air by a regular TV antenna that we have set up and connected to the laptop computer you see before you. This will only take a matter of seconds.

Once the Presidential message comes through, it will take priority and replace what was being fed. When the laptop receives the transmission, the first thing you will see will be banner scroll across the bottom of the screen. You will also hear the EAS tones as the message trips an existing EAS encoder/decoder. Because we will datacast text, audio and video in this demonstration, a Windows media player will open and you will see and hear a live message from that same official at FEMA headquarters. At the same time as these alerts are being sent, we will datacast text files (for those of us in the Washington area) that include critical information that the Department would be able to provide in the event of – for example – a biological attack.

In the demonstration, the audio that WETA datacasts will be received at XM Radio’s headquarters, uplinked to their satellite and received on the XM radio here in the room. Because of the extra satellite link it will take a few more seconds to get here.

Finally, these messages will be sent to these cellphones and Blackberries through the use of Alert Manager, a proprietary software technology developed by SpectraRep. For today’s demonstration, we are using the Internet to send messages to cell phones. In the pilot, wireless carriers received live messages off-air from WETA and successfully retransmitted them as text messages to designated cell phones without using the Internet.

LAWSON VISION COMMENTS

All the applications of public television datacasting that you saw are possible right now. Digital public television is providing the backbone for a network of networks that can deliver instant warnings to people wherever they are or whatever they’re doing. Initially, this will be a government-to-government and government-to-media system. Eventually, it will be a warning system for all hazards that can reach practically all devices. Whether you’ve got your cellphone at your kid's soccer match, listening to satellite or broadcast radio, surfing the Internet, or watching any of the 500 channels on TV, we can get an

emergency message to you, almost instantaneously. Local public stations stand ready to play an integral part in the new DEAS, both on a national and local scale.

We are not saying that public television’s DEAS is a silver bullet offering the total solution for all emergency communications.

However, we do want to make clear that our stations can offer the backbone for a unique, robust, and highly cost effective alert and warning system. It responds directly to the recommendations of the Katrina Commission and the requirements of the Executive Order signed by the President on June 26, 2006. Without the support of the Department that we are announcing today, we can deploy the basic delivery system in months, not years.

Although FEMA’s responsibility is Presidential messaging, the infrastructure and best practices developed in the national plan can be used by public television stations working with local, regional, and state authorities to serve their alert and warning needs.

APTS has demonstrated the DEAS before Congress, and they have embraced it. Both the House and Senate have introduced versions of the Warning, Alert, and Response Network (or WARN) Act.

The WARN Act establishes a National Alert System to provide a public communications network capable of alerting the public on a national, regional, or local basis. The WARN Act builds upon the infrastructure we are creating today. We hope Congress will act on this legislation quickly to extend the capabilities of this system to States and local jurisdictions as well.

In closing, I want to thank [Secretary Chertoff and] Director Paulison for their vote of confidence in the capability and willingness of public television to serve the public safety needs of this country. Public service is in the DNA of public television. Digital television is allowing us to roll out a new generation of content and services for the American people. We’ve always been about enhancing lives. Now we can help save lives as well.

Thank you.