First Public Demonstration of Mobile Emergency Alert System Harnesses Power of Mobile DTV Terrestrial Broadcasting, Enables Rich Media Emergency Communications

Progress on Pilot Project Highlighted at 2012 International CES;
Vegas PBS Delivers Video, Maps, Audio, Text to Mobile DTV Devices

LAS VEGAS, Jan. 8, 2012 – In the first public demonstration of the groundbreaking Mobile Emergency Alert System (M-EAS) Pilot Project, PBS and LG Electronics today showed how the new system, based on the ATSC Mobile Digital TV Standard, will benefit the public by giving them instantaneous, reliable, rich media alerts anywhere, anytime.

Highlighted in the Mobile Digital TV Tech Zone Pavilion at the 2012 International CES® (Booth 13547, LVCC Central Hall) are key PBS partners on the pilot project: LG Electronics and its Zenith subsidiary, which have developed M-EAS receivers and provided funding for the project; and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which provided a matching grant to PBS. Harris Broadcast and Roundbox are providing key components and technology.

At CES here this week, Vegas PBS – one of four PBS stations participating in the M-EAS Pilot Project – is transmitting via mobile DTV signals with rich media emergency alert content for simulated national and local emergency scenarios, including a suspicious package threat, an approaching tornado, an AMBER Alert and impending tsunami.

The terrestrial broadcast M-EAS project will evaluate the system's capabilities for delivering multimedia alerts (utilizing video, audio, text, and graphics) to mobile DTV-equipped cellphones, tablets, laptops, netbooks, and in-car navigation systems in order to avoid the potential roadblocks of chronic congestion of cellular systems during emergencies. The goals of the year-long pilot are to develop the basic capability and to prove the viability of M-EAS, to build on existing standards with the cooperation of three public TV stations, and to create a template for deployment by any TV station – public or commercial broadcaster. The first commercial broadcasters have already joined the project.

PBS Chief Technology Officer John McCoskey said the CES demonstration is a key milestone in the M-EAS project, for which the primary goal is to develop a system that can be easily replicated by both public and commercial broadcasters throughout the country to give access to vital emergency information to millions of viewers using mobile DTV receivers. "Whether utilized in times of national emergency, to warn of a local fast-approaching storm, or to advise the public of missing children, we believe that the new ATSC Mobile DTV system can be harnessed to do far more than just the delivery of linear TV channels," he said.

The public television broadcasters in Nevada, Massachusetts and Alabama are serving as test markets for the new M-EAS being developed now by PBS and LG. By using terrestrial "over the air" Mobile DTV broadcasting, rather than cellular network connectivity, M-EAS is expected to meet critical needs for emergency alerts.

"At CES, we're showing how this technology can help usher in a new era of mobile alerting systems on LG prototype smart phones. We think this new system will be extremely valuable to federal, state and local emergency management agencies and the public they serve, while extending the community service role of public and commercial broadcasters alike," said Dr. Jong Kim, president of Zenith R&D Lab, the U.S. research and development subsidiary of LG Electronics.

"Public media has long been a vital source for listeners and viewers to obtain accurate and critical information about their communities," said Mark Erstling, senior vice president, system development and media strategy at CPB. "We are proud to support PBS, local public media stations and LG in the development of new Mobile EAS technology. It leverages the speed and portability of new mobile technologies to help both public and commercial broadcasting stations provide essential local information in times of emergency."

M-EAS using mobile DTV would significantly enhance current capabilities for sending emergency alerts, because it does not have bandwidth bottlenecks that might overload current or planned cellular systems with millions of devices attempting to receive the alerts simultaneously. Utilizing terrestrial "over-the-air" broadcast TV transmissions, rather than relying on cell phone systems, the M-EAS requires no additional spectrum and will be an additional use of existing TV transmitters and towers. Standard equipment used to upgrade stations for transmission of Mobile DTV signals will be utilized.

Building on its long history of innovating broadcasting technology, public television is leading the way in the development and testing of the M-EAS pilot project. CPB provided funding to PBS for this new communications platform. Public television broadcasters Vegas PBS (KLVX), WGBH (Boston), and Alabama Public Television stations WBIQ (Birmingham) and WAIQ (Montgomery) are providing rich media content and serving as test markets for the project. Seattle commercial station KOMO-TV (Fisher Communications) developed the compelling tsunami video alert simulation. (No CPB funding has gone to Fisher or KOMO-TV).

Beyond life-saving emergency broadcasts and simple text alerts, the next-generation emergency alert system has far-reaching public safety benefits – both for first responders who need to access critical information, and for federal and state agencies to instantly reach millions of Americans with a single broadcast.

"With the Mobile EAS service, terrestrial broadcasters will be able to send everything from AMBER alert photos to detailed maps with evacuation routes, video clips, and extensive information that viewers anywhere/anytime will find invaluable in a disaster. M-EAS goes way beyond a short text message on a cell phone network that may become congested in an emergency. It's harnessing the power of 'one-to-many' transmissions from a TV broadcaster to the viewing audience," said PBS's McCoskey.

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