

Mobile-EAS System To Be Demoeed at APCO Convention

PBS and tech partners will show public safety officials how mobile DTV broadcasts could be used for emergency alerts

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Broadcasters and various technology partners will be demonstrating how mobile DTV broadcasts could be used to deliver emergency alerts on August 21st at the annual conference of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO), which is being held in Minneapolis Minnesota between August 19 and 22nd.

The Mobile-Emergency Alert System technologies have already been demonstrated at CES and NAB this year and the APCO demo is part of a year-long M-EAS pilot project during which emergency alerts were transmitted and received through prototype equipment deployed in Massachusetts, Alabama and Nevada via public TV stations.

The project and APCO demonstration is being backed by PBS, LG Electronics, which developed M-EAS receivers, LG's Zenith subsidiary, which provided technical support and funding for the project, and Harris Broadcast, which equips TV stations with the necessary equipment.

The M-EAS system is able to video, rich text, evacuation maps and other materials to users during an emergency using the mobile DTV broadcast systems that many stations are deploying.

M-EAS requires no additional radiofrequency spectrum and will use standard equipment needed to upgrade stations for mobile DTV broadcasts over existing TV transmitters and towers. Proponents note that a similar system in Japan played a key role in delivering information during the earthquake and tsunami last year after cellular networks collapsed under heavy usage.

The Advanced Television Systems Committee is also currently working on

a modification to the mobile DTV standard that would make it easier to deliver these alerts.

"Mobile-EAS is a powerful new tool for both public alerting and tactical video for first responders, and it's an option that will soon be available nationwide to enhance public safety," said John Lawson, an LG adviser and former member of four FCC advisory committees on homeland security communications, who also serves as the executive director of the Mobile500 Alliance in a statement. "Harnessing the power of mobile digital TV broadcasting, M-EAS easily overlays an entire metropolitan area with a signal that is not dependent on mobile wireless network infrastructure. It effectively bypasses bottlenecks caused by congestion and will deliver rich-media content to mobile phones, tablets, and APCO-25 standardized emergency responder radios."

"Our work together over the past year proves the viability of our concept - that mobile television can be an effective way to reach millions of people with a single highly-robust broadcast, without relying on access to an overburdened wireless mobile network," added PBS CTO John McCoskey, who notes that the proposed M-EAS system would also complement the current cellular-based system that transmits up to 90-character text messages to mobile phones. "We believe that the new ATSC Mobile DTV system can be harnessed to do far more than just the delivery of linear TV channels."

Fisher Communications' KOMO-TV in Seattle also supported the pilot project by creating an tsunami alert simulation.

"Our field trials effectively demonstrated that M-EAS can play an integral role in the future of public safety communications, and work is now under way to finalize the industry standard for M-EAS through the ATSC (Advanced Television Systems Committee)," McCoskey said. "This life-saving enhancement to the ATSC Mobile DTV standard is expected to be standardized by early next year."

M-EAS is also compliant with the international Common Alerting Protocol

and designed for full incorporation into the U.S. Integrated Public Alert and Warning System.