



The Power of Ten Watts to Protect Millions

By Bill Baker, Board Member, American Association of Information Radio Operations (AAIRO)

It's a special experience to watch a new association come together for a common cause. The American Association of Information Radio Operators (AAIRO) incorporated just last month.

AAIRO was born because emergency managers and public safety professionals across the United States recognized that the unprecedented consolidation of the commercial radio industry, allowed by the Federal Communications Commission, leaves many local radio stations unattended, with whole communities devoid of timely public broadcasts during emergencies.¹

AAIRO members use licensed 10-watt AM Travelers' Information Stations (TIS) to broadcast messages and advisories directly to motorists 24 hours a day on the AM band in their communities.

The Public Value of Travelers' Information Stations

The unique public value of these humble radio systems was first recognized after the Loma Prieta earthquake near San Francisco in 1989, when one Bay Area community was able to broadcast critical safety advisories to citizens even in

the absence of electrical power and phone service. Many residents in the area had access to automobile radios powered by batteries. Because the radio station also was set up to run via battery/generator power, the police department was able to send minute-by-minute information directly to the community without delay. Lives were saved, and property was protected.

Growth of TIS Stations and Their Service to Communities

After the quake, dozens of other San Francisco area communities licensed and installed the stations. Since then, the value of the 10-watt Information Station technology has proven itself again and again:

- In local disasters such as the 2007 tornados in Greensburg, Kansas,
- In regional emergencies like the 2003 power outage in the Northeast, and
- Even in large scale tragedies like Hurricane Katrina.

Stations Located in Many Venues Across United States

TIS stations may be configured with receivers that break into

programming with all-hazard alerts from the National Weather Service, targeted to particular counties served. Since they were first allowed in 1977, hundreds of these stations have sprung up at a variety of venues where safety is critical: university campuses, federal agencies, military bases, U.S. border crossings, major airports, bridge authorities and national event sites. TIS stations are found in communities of all sizes and characters: large counties, small villages, major metropolitan areas, rural towns and suburban areas.

Looking Forward

AAIRO will become a conduit for public safety and emergency managers to speak with one voice regarding the acknowledged value of the Information Radio Station technology and also to interconnect members to share best practices and common concerns. Now, 31 years after the adoption of the FCC rules that birthed the Information Radio Station and 1,500 radio stations later, most agree that the time is right to get organized.

¹ Klinenberg, Eric. "Air Support." The New York Times, Jan. 28, 2007.

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Engineering in conjunction with the Texas Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) and the National Emergency Response and Rescue Training Center (NERRTC). The EM★ES simulation can support local, jurisdictional, regional and large-scale response training and exercise operations involving human "role players" and computer-injected events. The system

can be used in a distributed LAN mode, a Web browser mode or a combination of the two.

About the Texas Engineering Extension Service

The Texas Engineering Extension Service, a member of The Texas A&M University System, offers hands-on, customized first responder training, homeland security exercises, technical assistance and technology transfer services impacting Texas and

beyond. TEEX programs include fire services, homeland security, law enforcement, public works, safety and health, search and rescue, and economic solutions.

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