

must be made within two years of tower construction or modification.

The new rules include provisions to assess existing towers in the immediate vicinity of AM station. As the commission did not define towers, we take this to mean any structure that is not a building, including water tanks, electric transmission towers and advertising structures that meet the distance and height criteria. Before antennas are added to a structure that meets the distance and height regulatory criteria, the tower must be analyzed for interference and detuned if required. The full scope of this provision is not yet clear and the commission has been queried for clarification.

AM tower collocation regulations are also moved to this rule section. Specific actions are outlined for adding antennas to an existing AM broadcast tower.

The notification process is very clearly defined. The time and content of notification are listed in the new rules, and construction must not begin until acceptance of the notification by the station or thirty days has elapsed from the time the station receives notification. An expedited notification may be requested, but work is not allowed to start before either thirty days has elapsed or the station has provided written concurrence.

A notification exception can be made in the event of an emergency situation involving essential public services, public health, or public welfare. In these cases the station must be notified within five days and any issues of pattern distortion must be coordinated with the station promptly.

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TIS RULE CHANGES

Emergency Rebroadcasting Now Permitted

Across the U.S., public safety officials

are applauding the FCC's changes to the Traveler's Information Station (TIS) rules. The new Part 90 rules took effect on September 18, 2013 with the FCC's declared intent to "promote a more efficient and effective service." The TIS rule changes were prompted by the American Association of Information Radio Operators (AAIRO) to resolve the confusion surrounding the FCC's definition of acceptable broadcast content.

Part of the rulemaking clarified that existing broadcast categories (47 C.F.R. Sec. 90.242(a) (7)) already include travel advisories that allow some "imminent danger" content. Such content could include 5-1-1 travel information, parking, current driving travel times, air flight status, truck weigh stations, driver rest areas, and the location of truck services, road closures and construction.

The new rules now permit the broadcast of information related to travel, emergencies or an imminent threat to the safety of life or property, and allows for the definition as to what constitutes an imminent threat to be determined at the local level, given the "intimate knowledge of local conditions." Certain rebroadcasting of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio and other weather-related content is now permitted, as is limited simulcast broadcast of content relevant to the jurisdiction. September's rule changes triggered separate and not-yet-enacted rule changes that would allow for the relaxation of transmitter audio filtering requirements.

To determine what meets FCC broadcast criteria, the AAIRO developed the mnemonic device TIDE to help TIS operators select broadcast content: T for Travel, ID for Imminent Danger and E for Emergency information. Weather radio information, specifically NOAA's All Hazard Alerts, pass the TIDE test. Less extreme weather advisories that meet the TIDE test but do not rise to the level of

a NOAA alert could be acceptable for broadcast.

Practical examples of the newly allowed emergency and imminent danger broadcast content include Amber and Silver



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alerts, evacuation routes, points of assembly, locations of shelters, health care providers and other emergency facilities. The imminent danger rule clarification allows the University of Nevada, Reno to broadcast text-based alert notifications automatically on its TIS station so motorists can hear them in their cars up to 5 miles from campus.

At a Glance
Five Key Facts About FCC Rule Changes for Traveler's Information Stations

1. Information related to emergencies or an "imminent threat" may now be broadcast over TIS airwaves.
2. What constitutes an "imminent threat" will be defined at the local level.
3. Certain rebroadcasting of NOAA Weather Radio is also permitted.
4. Remember TIDE: Travel, Imminent Danger, Emergency information.
5. More information at www.fcc.gov and www.aaio.org.

The humble TIS has increasingly assumed the role of a local emergency information source, particularly after recent terrorist attacks and natural disasters.

Examples abound: Hudson County, N.J., was assigned a special AM frequency—AM 1710—by the FCC for its Information Radio Station. Linked on three sides by bridges, the county is an emergency evacuation area for

to the FCC from a coordinated and national platform,” says Bill Baker, AAIRO president. As such, the AAIRO worked for five years to advocate the current FCC rule changes. “Were it not for the tragedy [Hurricane Sandy] on the East Coast last fall and the value that the TIS stations out there so clearly presented, I have my doubts that the FCC would have moved the rulemaking action forward.”

“Out of disaster can come some good things sometimes.”

Manhattan and also has a high hazard potential due to intense industrial concentration and flood-prone topography. Shoreline communities such as Manasquan, N.J. designated their TIS stations as the primary information sources for citizens during Hurricane Sandy, with the foreknowledge that all conventional information outlets would be offline. They were. Manasquan also “StreamCasted” its information station programming to smartphones and the Internet so that people who were in homes or had evacuated could learn the status of the recovery effort.

The AAIRO was formed “in order to present the concerns of TIS operators

“Out of disaster can come some good things sometimes,” Bakers says.

TIS and Highway Advisory Radio stations are licensed to the government, quasi-governmental agencies, and certain health and emergency service providers working in conjunction with government entities. Systems may be licensed on any frequency from 530 to 1700 kHz in the AM band. Presently there are more than 1,500 agencies operating licensed TIS throughout the U.S. Information about TIS eligibility, operational limitations and licensing can be found at www.fcc.gov/ (keyword = TIS) or www.aairo.org/. ||PSC||

~ERNEST GALLO