

The Emergency Alert System and PPM Encoding

The “Emergency Alert System” (EAS) is a national public warning system that federal, state, or local authorities may use to broadcast an emergency message simultaneously on all broadcast, cable, and satellite media outlets.

In recent years, authorities have expanded use of the EAS for broadcast of regional messages such as child AMBER Alerts and severe weather warnings.

In essence, the EAS is an “open line” that connects all radio stations to each other; the FCC requires all radio broadcasters—AM, FM, LPFM, and satellite radio—to participate in the EAS.

Upon activation of the EAS, the system’s “Primary Entry Point” (PEP) stations provide the emergency message to other radio stations via dedicated EAS equipment. The stations’ EAS equipment then synchronize with each other, authenticate the message (via the familiar EAS tones), and broadcast it.

Arbitron requires that a radio station install its PPM™ encoding equipment in its air chain so that it does not interfere with the clarity, reception, or transmission of EAS messages. The practical effect of this specification is that both the PEP station’s and the retransmitting station’s encoding will always be included in an EAS message. (The secondary station’s encoder stops encoding only during the alert tones.)

Because all stations in the same general area are likely to connect to the same PEP station, it is reasonable to expect that all of a Metro’s Panelists will be exposed to the same PEP station encoding while listening to the EAS message.

Because most EAS messages are too short to affect quarter-hour crediting, the “mass exposure” of a Metro’s Panelists to the PEP station’s encoding should not affect any station’s Average Quarter-Hour audience estimates.

Conversely, minute-by-minute audience analyses for the minute(s) that includes an EAS broadcast may reflect an atypical increase in the PEP station’s Cume.

For additional information on PPM encoding and the Emergency Alert System, contact:

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