

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

NOAA Weather Radio has evolved into a dissemination device of remarkable potential. From the user's perspective, it is accessible through small, portable radio devices of quite moderate price, many of which now combine silent-standby and alert capabilities with a means of message screening to minimize false or unwanted alarms. From the government's perspective, Weather Radio is a means, already installed and functioning nationwide, by which federal, state, and local authorities can communicate to the public any type of threat that looms, alerting endangered citizens even if some hazard arises while they are asleep or remotely encamped.

The system's primary, and perennial, limitation is a simple lack of public awareness and use. The author could find few studies surveying levels of Weather Radio penetration with the public.²⁶² Wernly correctly observed that "NOAA Weather Radio's

²⁶² *Weather and Forecasting*, a publication of the American Meteorological Society, did publish in September 1995 the results of a March 1994 telephone survey conducted in west Tennessee: "Interviews were completed with 407 respondents for an error rate of +/-14.86%. The data were subjected to tests of proportions, contingency table, and chi-square statistical analysis. The study revealed that 24.6% of west Tennessee households have NWR receivers, but only a third of those, or 8.1% of regional households, continuously monitor the service. A test alert message was broadcast on NWR just prior to the telephone survey. Based on the number of respondents who acknowledged receiving the message, only 6.4% of west Tennessee households can be expected to actually hear an emergency notification on NWR." Redmond, J. W. "NOAA Weather Radio as an Emergency Communication Vehicle in West Tennessee." Vol. 10, No. 3. In addition, Estelle stated in an email on 8 November 2002, "As Chief of Public Services I conducted a national survey of about 1300 people on their use of public weather information (used a commercial company to do the work). This survey was done in the late 70's or perhaps early 80's. It included a question on NWR and showed that

link to EAS obviates this concern to a certain extent.”²⁶³ And yet, getting word of approaching danger out to citizens via today’s EAS, absent Weather Radio, requires that people be awake and tuned to the commercial media. It bears repeating that the only device that can *awaken* citizens to danger via an alarm feature is a NOAA Weather Radio receiver; and anecdotal evidence certainly suggests that the majority of people do not know that this service exists—including even some high government officials whose job descriptions bear directly on the effective communication of threats to the citizenry.

If an individual taxpayer does not avail himself of this service and unnecessarily suffers the consequences of having some disaster befall unannounced, that is a shame. If, in a time of manifest terror threats, our government does not competently harness the extraordinary warning infrastructure that two generations of civil servants have very conscientiously built for us in NOAA Weather Radio, that is little short of criminal. It is yet to be seen whether the nation’s new Homeland Security office will move forcefully to incorporate NOAA Weather Radio more seamlessly into our national-security infrastructure.

There is at least reason to hope that the Bush administration will press for better utilization of NOAA’s broadcast network. A 22 June 2000 “Statement of Administration Policy” included the following entry: “The Administration strongly recommends full funding for...NOAA weather radio...”²⁶⁴ Moreover, President Bush is known to be a personal fan of NOAA Weather Radio. At a visit to NOAA headquarters in Silver Spring,

few people were aware of the program at the time. As far as I know my national telephone survey has never been repeated, which is a shame, as such surveys really are quite inexpensive to conduct.” Estelle said he had spent “about \$50,000” on the survey.

²⁶³ Email to the author. 4 November 2002.

²⁶⁴ White House Office of Management and Budget. 17 Nov. 2002
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/legislative/sap/106-2/HR4690-h.html>>.

Maryland, on 14 February 2002, Bush extolled the benefits of the service, saying that he keeps a Weather Radio receiver on his desk at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.²⁶⁵ Given today's soft economy and resultant federal-budget constraints, a strong case is evident for capitalizing on the dissemination systems our government already has at its disposal. Barbara Watson, the warning coordination meteorologist at the Sterling, Virginia Weather Service Office, put it succinctly: "All in all...NOAA Weather Radio is likely the best device, time-wise (direct from NWS), cost-wise (under \$100), and reliability-wise to alert you of a warning."²⁶⁶

No replacement system is in the works; no alternative dissemination method comes close to Weather Radio's capabilities. Why isn't our federal government shouting its merits from the rooftops?

²⁶⁵ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *NOAA News Online*. "Story 866: President Bush Visits NOAA Exhibits." 15 Feb. 2002. 17 Nov. 2002 <<http://www.noanews.noaa.gov/stories/s866.htm>>.

²⁶⁶ Watson.