



Wisconsin Well Represented At National EAS Summit

By Gary Timm, Wisconsin EAS Chair, Journal Broadcast Group

On Feb. 28 and March 1, 2010, the 6th annual EAS National Summit was held in Washington, DC. The Summit was funded by NAB, and organized by NAB and NASBA, the Alliance of State Broadcasters Associations, of which WBA is a member. Michelle Vetterkind, WBA President & CEO is a member of the NASBA EAS Committee, which plans the Summit each year. Wisconsin was well represented at this year's Summit, as our contingent consisted of Gary Timm, Michelle Vetterkind and Leonard Charles from the Wisconsin EAS Committee, and Linda Baun from WBA. We joined 175 other participants from 44 states and territories.

In addition to panels presented by the emergency managers, broadcasters, cable operators and state broadcasters association attendees, we heard from both the chair and ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response, of the Committee on Homeland Security. There were also extensive briefings from both FCC and FEMA on the forthcoming Next Generation EAS using CAP, the Common Alerting Protocol. FEMA gave Q3 to Q4 of 2010 as its latest estimate to adopt CAP, which means all broadcasters would need to purchase CAP-capable equipment within 180 days of the actual adoption date. FEMA will have a booth this year at NAB2010 in Las Vegas, and will be demonstrating this EAS/CAP equipment. You can find them at booth C2052. FEMA announced that it will be providing CAP messages to all broadcasters by the end of the 180-day period, thus upholding their end of the bargain on mandating this equipment.

Much of the questioning by attendees involved EAS training and funding. FEMA said it is currently addressing both of these issues. Existing FEMA grants are being examined to see where EAS funding can be applied. Regarding training, FEMA is working with the Emergency Management Institute to develop EAS CAP and emergency alerting practices courses.

The FCC, NWS, NAB and EAS/CAP equipment manufacturers all reported their progress as well. FCC is already examining how the EAS Rules will need to be updated for EAS CAP, with the input of an FCC Advisory Committee of which Wisconsin's Leonard Charles is a member. The Commission said it will also continue to search for spectrum to allocate for exclusive use by EAS nationwide, a request the EAS community has been pressing for years. The National Weather Service is transitioning its alerting to CAP as well, which will be provided to broadcasters via an Internet portal. NAB has been having regular meetings with both FCC and FEMA on EAS issues, as well as continuing its campaign to get FM radio receivers into cell phone handsets to improve the public's access to local emergency information. The EAS/CAP equipment manufacturers have formed a collaboration group to collectively help FEMA vet its protocols, and they are now preparing to enter the FEMA EAS/CAP testing process.

Overall, it seemed that although some concerns such as funding and training have yet to be solved, all parties involved are making significant progress in their areas of expertise to move the EAS CAP effort forward in a positive manner.