



# Consumer Guide

## Accessibility to Emergency Information on Television

FCC rules require broadcasters and cable operators to make local emergency information accessible to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, and to persons who are blind or have visual disabilities. This rule means that emergency information must be provided both aurally and in a visual format.

### What qualifies as emergency information?

Emergency information about a current emergency is information intended to help protect life, health, safety or property. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- immediate weather situations: tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, tidal waves, earthquakes, icing conditions, heavy snows, widespread fires, warnings and watches of impending weather changes
- community situations such as: discharge of toxic gases, widespread power failures, industrial explosions, civil disorders, school closings and changes in school bus schedules resulting from such conditions

### Making emergency information accessible

**For persons who are deaf or hard of hearing**, emergency information provided in the audio portion of programming must be provided either using closed captioning or other methods of visual presentation, such as open captioning, crawls or scrolls that appear on the screen. Video programming distributors must ensure that emergency information does not block any closed captioning, and closed captioning should not block any emergency information provided by means other than closed captioning. Closed captions are visual text displays hidden in the video signal. You can access closed captions through your remote control or on-screen menu or through a special decoder. Open captions are an integral part of the television picture, like subtitles in a movie. In other words, open captions cannot be turned off. Text that advances very slowly across the bottom of the screen is referred to as a crawl; displayed text or graphics that move up and down the screen are said to scroll.

**For persons who are blind or visually impaired**, emergency information provided in the video portion of a regularly scheduled newscast or a newscast that interrupts regular programming must be made accessible through an aural description of emergency information in the main audio. If the emergency information is being provided visually during regular programming through screen crawls or scrolls, for example, it must be accompanied by an aural tone and made accessible through the use of a secondary audio stream, such as a radio. The aural tone will alert persons with vision disabilities that the broadcaster is providing emergency information and they should tune to the secondary audio stream for more information.

### What information about the emergency must be provided?

The information provided visually and aurally must include critical details regarding the emergency and how to respond. Examples of critical details include:

- specific details regarding the areas that may be affected by the emergency
- evacuation orders, detailed descriptions of areas to be evacuated and specific evacuation routes
- approved shelters or the way to take shelter in one's home
- instructions on how to secure personal property
- road closures



- how to obtain relief assistance

In determining whether particular details need to be presented visually and aurally, programmers may rely on their own good faith judgments.

There may be instances when an emergency affects the broadcast station or non-broadcast network or distributor. In such instances it may be impossible to provide accessible emergency information.

### **Filing a complaint**

If you have a complaint about failure to provide emergency information in an accessible format, you can first try to resolve it with the video programming distributor, although you are not required to do so. You can also file a complaint with the FCC. You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission  
 Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
 Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
 445 12th Street, S.W.  
 Washington, DC 20554

### **What to include in your complaint**

Your complaint should indicate the following:

- whether you are filing a complaint on behalf of another party, and, if so, the party's name, address, email address, day time phone number and your relationship to the party
- preferred format or method of response (letter, fax, voice phone call, email, TRS, TTY, ASCII text, audio recording or Braille)
- that your complaint is about accessibility of emergency information on television
- the date and time or other details about timing of the lack of access to emergency information on television
- television station call sign, TV channel, location , date, time and detailed description of the emergency

### **What happens after I file a complaint?**

The FCC will notify the video programming distributor or provider of the complaint, to which the distributor or provider must reply within 30 days. The FCC will make its decision and take appropriate action based on the information in the complaint and the response, and any other information the FCC may request from either party.

### **Accessible formats**

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

###

*This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.*

Last Reviewed: 1/22/15

