U.S. Department of Education

Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) Technical Assistance Center

ERCMExpress

Volume 2, Issue 4, 2006

ALL-HAZARDS NOAA WEATHER RADIO NETWORK NOW AVAILABLE

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has upgraded its Weather Radio network of the 1970s and 1980s to the All-Hazards NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) network. In 2004, NOAA and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) collaborated to enable DHS to disseminate homeland security-related information over the NWR network. DHS's goal was to produce an effective and inexpensive tool for communicating both weather-related and non-weather-related alerts to local communities—especially their schools—that rely on the information provided by the NWR network to better respond to a crisis or emergency. Listeners constantly monitor the broadcasts for: weather warnings, watches and forecasts; public safety hazards such as chemical spills; terrorist threat advisories; or Amber Alerts (for missing and abducted children). Whether an emergency is national, regional or local, NWR provides communities with instant access to information to protect their citizens and facilities.

NOAA Weather Radio Features

The five features listed below make it easy to integrate the NWR network into offices and schools:

1. **Silent:** Tone alerts signal that information (e.g., a weather warning) is about to be aired, with broadcasts continuing until the alert officially ends. Because the radio is silent until a warning light is issued, it will not disturb the working or learning environments. A text message also appears in the display window on the radio to identify the emergency.
2. **Battery-powered:** The NOAA weather radio also operates with batteries, enabling it to serve as a back-up communication channel during a power outage or other systemic failure.
3. **Programmable:** The radio can be programmed to receive alerts (Specific Area Message Encoding) for a specific geographic area such as a city, county or state.
4. **Universally designed:** To make the radios accessible to people with disabilities, they are outfitted with strobe lights and can be linked to cell phones, Portable Digital Assistants (PDAs), personal computers or teletypewriters.
5. **Language accessible:** In selected areas, the radios receive alerts in Spanish as well as in English.

NWR Frequencies

All-hazards weather radios receive broadcasts on the public service band at the following frequencies:

- 162.400 MHz;
- 162.425 MHz;
- 162.450 MHz;
- 162.475 MHz;
- 162.500 MHz;
- 162.525 MHz. and
- 162.550 MHz;

Using NWR at School

NWR's all-hazards radios should be placed in schools' main offices or other strategic locations where designated staff can monitor the radios throughout the day. Whoever monitors the radios must know what action to take for each type of emergency or crisis that is broadcasted. Having a local map nearby will help officials track the emergency or crisis and plan a response.

> I applaud the principals and school [staff] who work hard to keep our students safe. These radios will help to provide as much advance warning as possible, so schools can be prepared to handle any situation calmly and safely.
>
> *U.S. Secretary of Education*
> *Margaret Spellings*

Obtaining and Programming an All-Hazards Radio

All-hazards weather radios may be purchased in electronic stores and generally cost between $30 and $80. The equipment must be programmed using the radio menu or printed instructions, which also describe how to program the radio for a specific geographic area. Receivers with tone-alert capability but not Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) capability will warn listeners about emergencies anywhere within the coverage area of the radio transmitter (typically several counties). The NWR network includes more than 1,000 radio transmitters across the country that broadcast continuous weather information directly from the National Weather Service. Coverage areas continue to expand; updated coverage area maps can be found at http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/usframes.html.

Additional Resources

- **NOAA Weather Radio Coverage Maps**
  http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/usframes.html
- **NOAA Weather Radio SAME Codes**
  http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/indexnw.htm
- **Designing Your Severe Weather Plan**
  http://www.erh.noaa.gov/er/lwx/swep
- **U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, Emergency Planning**
  http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan

For information about the Emergency Response and Crisis Management grant program, contact Tara Hill at tara.hill@ed.gov; Michelle Sinkgraven at michelle.sinkgraven@ed.gov; or Sara Strizzi at sara.strizzi@ed.gov. suggestions for newsletter topics should be sent to the ERCM TA Center suggestion box at www.ercm.org.

This publication was funded by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education under contract number GS23F8062H with Caliber Associates Inc. The contracting officer's representative was Tara Hill. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government. This publication also contains hyperlinks and URLs for information created and maintained by private organizations. This information is provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for controlling or guaranteeing the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information or a hyperlink or URL does not reflect the importance of the organization, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered.