

Equipping Mobile Phones with Broadcast Radio for Emergency Preparedness

For little cost, manufacturers can include a radio receiver in mobile phones that would give consumers convenient access to the free entertainment and lifeline services provided by America's local radio broadcasters.

For 60 years, broadcasters have proudly served as the backbone of the public warning system through the delivery of Emergency Alert System (EAS) warnings. Americans also rely on local broadcasters for ongoing, live coverage during emergencies, such as lifesaving information on storm paths, evacuation routes and other critical news. The next generation of public alerting is currently being deployed to enable emergency warnings to reach Americans through a multitude of technologies and platforms. Broadcasters fully support this goal, and seek to further it by expanding the availability of mobile phones with broadcast radio reception.

A recent nationwide survey found that 76 percent of Americans are willing to pay a small one-time fee to extend their access to radio through mobile phones, and 73 percent said having a radio-capable mobile phone would be "important" during an emergency.

Globally, it is expected that roughly 700 million radio-capable mobile phones will be on the market by the end of this year, or approximately 45 percent of all active mobile phones.

But in the U.S., penetration of radio-enabled mobile phones substantially lags the global market, largely because mobile phone operators in the U.S. enjoy exclusive control over the manufacturing of handsets for their services. NAB has been working to educate both mobile telephone operators and policymakers on the benefits of expanding the availability of radio-enabled mobile phones. In fact, 17 members of the Congressional Black Caucus recently sent a letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requesting that the FCC hold a hearing to explore the potential benefits to the public of including radio tuners in mobile phones.

Because radio tuners rely on over-the-air radio signals, there is no risk that radio-enabled mobile phones would clog up the existing switched wireless networks or broadband networks and impede the delivery of important emergency information.

For this reason, radio-enabled mobile phones will make Americans safer. The text-based system being developed by the wireless industry will limit emergency warnings to a short message of about 90 characters. In contrast, a mobile handset with free radio reception provides consumers with instant and reliable access to both emergency alerts and in-depth emergency information. Text-based warnings alone cannot provide this type of important emergency information.

More than 241 million Americans weekly depend on local radio to provide the news and information they need. For the benefit of the American public, radio-enabled mobile phones should be a critical component of any next-generation wireless alerting solution.

Will you urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the FCC and the mobile phone industry to consider ways to expand the availability of radio-enabled mobile phones?