

Accessibility to Emergency Information on Television

FCC rules require broadcasters and cable operators to make local emergency information accessible in English 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 in both audio and visual formats.

What qualifies as emergency information?

Emergency information is intended to help protect life, health, safety or property. Examples include:

- 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: widespread power failures, industrial explosions, civil disorders, discharge of toxic gases, 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. Closed captions are visual text displays hidden in the video signal, usually accessible through your remote control, on-screen menu or through a special decoder. Open captions are an integral part of the television picture, like subtitles in a movie, so open captions cannot be turned off. Crawls are text that advance very slowly across the bottom of the screen. Displayed text or graphics that move up and down the screen are said to scroll. 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.

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 audio description of emergency information. If the emergency information is provided visually during regular programming through screen crawls or scrolls, for example, it must be accompanied by an audio tone and made accessible through the use of the television channel's secondary audio stream. The 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 emergency information should be provided?

The information provided visually and aurally must include critical details regarding the emergency and how to respond, such as:

- 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, non-broadcast network or distributor. In such instances it may be impossible to provide accessible emergency information.

Filing a complaint

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); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- 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

Alternate formats

To request this article in an alternate format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

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