

# Accessibility Requirements for Emergency Information on Television

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# FCC's Rules for Accessible Televised Emergency Information

FCC rules require broadcasters and multichannel video programming distributors (MVPDs) to make critical details of emergency information accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and to people who are blind or visually impaired.



# What Qualifies as “Emergency Information”?

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- Emergency information is intended to help protect life, health, safety, or property. Examples include:
  - Immediate weather situations: tornadoes, floods, tidal waves, earthquakes, heavy snows, and widespread fires, and
  - Community situations such as: pandemics, widespread power failures, industrial explosions, civil disorders, and discharge of toxic gases.



# What are the “critical details” of an emergency that must be made accessible?

- Critical details may include:
  - the areas affected by the emergency,
  - evacuation orders, details of areas to be evacuated, specific evacuation routes,
  - approved shelters or how to take shelter in one's home,
  - steps to secure personal property,
  - road closures, and
  - sources for relief assistance.
- Usually, the rule applies to local emergencies, but may apply to large-scale disasters and the aftermath of an emergency.



# Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired

- Emergency information that is provided visually during a regularly scheduled newscast, or newscast that interrupts regular programming, must be made accessible by aurally describing the emergency information in the main audio portion of the programming.
- Emergency information (such as screen crawls or scrolls) that is provided visually during programming that is neither a regularly scheduled newscast, nor a newscast that interrupts regular programming, must be accompanied with an aural tone and made accessible using a secondary audio stream.



# Use of Secondary Audio Stream

- Emergency information on secondary audio stream must be preceded by an aural tone and conveyed in full at least twice.
- Emergency information provided through use of text-to-speech must be intelligible and must use the correct pronunciation of relevant information.
- Emergency information must supersede all other information on secondary audio stream.
- 5-year waiver (expiring 5/26/23) re: visual, non-textual emergency information on a secondary audio stream (such as radar maps or other graphic displays).
- MVPDs must pass through a secondary audio stream on any application or plug-in that they provide to consumers to access linear programming on tablets, smartphones, laptops, and similar devices over the MVPD's network.



# Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Emergency information in the audio portion of the televised programming must be closed captioned or accessible through other methods of visual presentation. Sec. 79.4 has separate captioning requirements for covered IP programming.
- Emergency information cannot block closed captioning and closed captioning cannot block emergency information that is not captioned.
- Stations permitted to use Electronic Newsroom Technique (ENT) for live programming must make unscripted emergency information accessible by some other form of visual presentation. For examples and guidance, see the Disability Advisory Committee ENT Toolkit: <https://www.fcc.gov/file/19825/download>.



# Best Practices

- Stations should have internal protocols to obtain closed captioning resources quickly in the event of an emergency.
- If an American Sign Language interpreter is present, make that person visible at all times on the television screen.
- Use plain language and pictorial information to make emergency information accessible to people with and without cognitive disabilities.





# How Can Consumers File Complaints?

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Online complaint form:  
[www.fcc.gov/accessiblitycomplaints](http://www.fcc.gov/accessiblitycomplaints)

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Phone: 202-418-2517

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ASL Videophone: 844-432-2275

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E-mail: [DRO@fcc.gov](mailto:DRO@fcc.gov)

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# Your Resources

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- FCC's rules about televised emergency information: <https://www.fcc.gov/general/access-emergency-information-television>.
- ASL video: [www.fcc.gov/TVEmergencyAccessASL](http://www.fcc.gov/TVEmergencyAccessASL).
- For specific questions, contact: Bill Wallace, Attorney Advisor, Disability Rights Office, 202-418-2716, [William.Wallace@fcc.gov](mailto:William.Wallace@fcc.gov).

