NOAA Weather Radio Initiatives

Remote Off Air Monitoring System (ROAMS) Successfully Tested

The NWR Program Office, with the help of Southern Region Headquarters (SRH) and INH Technologies in Fort Worth, Texas, recently concluded field testing of the enhanced version of the ROAMS. ROAMS is a system that interfaces with the NWR transmitter and provides a means to remotely diagnose transmitter problems, or allows the transmitter site to call the field office and report a problem.

ROAMS performed well during the tests at 10 NWS locations around the country. The early version of ROAMS did not measure up and consequently saw limited use. The enhanced version of ROAMS has been completely re-engineered and features synthetic voice. All known problems encountered in the earlier ROAMS have been eliminated.

One significant problem became apparent during the test that was not related to the functionality of ROAMS. The lack of acceptance of ROAMS as a vital front-line system in forecast offices is the problem. In some instances during ROAMS testing, the system was deactivated because it was felt that the alarms (telephone calls from the transmitter) were either false or had become a nuisance. Follow-up investigation of each alarm received indicated that ROAMS had accurately reported abnormal conditions.

Training is required to provide field personnel with the knowledge necessary to respond to ROAMS indicators and alarms. It is also necessary to instill a level of confidence in the capabilities of ROAMS. These are the goals of the NWR Program Office as they prepare to field ROAMS on an NWS-wide basis.

There are currently 146 ROAMS units being assembled and prepared for shipment to various field offices. As quickly as funds become available, additional ROAMS will be shipped to field offices for implementation. The NWR Program Office is also preparing a training video and documentation for each ROAMS location. Field offices should prepare for the arrival of ROAMS and ensure that procedures and/or policies are in place to facilitate immediate operation of this diagnostic system. OSO and OM are working together on this initiative to provide for as smooth an implementation and transition as possible.

The importance of field personnel to become familiar with ROAMS and its capabilities cannot be overstated. Simply put, ROAMS is the heart beat of the dissemination efforts of the forecast office. If the transmitter system is sick, ROAMS will know. If ROAMS is ignored, the transmitter may fail. If the transmitter fails, the forecast office is "off the air."

Questions pertaining to ROAMS should be forwarded to Darryl Modracek (OSO31) at (301) 713-1847 or Stan Johnson (OSO153) at (301) 713-1736.

—Stan Johnson, NWR Program Manager, WSH

NWR Specific Area Message Encoder (SAME) Implementation on Schedule

The national implementation of NWR SAME is well underway and proceeding on schedule. The plan calls for all NWR consoles to be equipped with NWR SAME by the end of this calendar year (1996). This implementation is planned to coincide with the Federal Communication Commission's mandated activation of the new EAS in January 1997. In addition to the more than 80 NWR SAME systems already deployed around the NWS, 140 new systems have been shipped to forecast offices in each region. Another 140 systems are being assembled and are scheduled to be delivered by the end of July 1996.

The forecast offices are encouraged to install the systems upon receipt and integrate its use with the normal office operations policy. Many forecast offices have already established policies and procedures with state and local emergency management agencies, many of which have NWR SAME decoders, for operational use of the system. This practice is encouraged and may well be required in the future of EAS.

—Stan Johnson, NWR Program Manager, WSH

NOAA Weather Radio (NWR)— A Unique Expansion Succeeds

On December 28, 1995, NWR in Central Region began a unique expansion project test at the U.S. Army installation, Lexington Blue Grass Depot, in Madison County, Kentucky. The U.S. Congress directed the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEP), of which the Lexington depot is one of eight sites in the Nation, to begin disposal of chemical weapons. In the event of a chemical spill, they (Congress) deemed it necessary to utilize all existing public warnings systems to warn the local population of the accident. NWR, the all hazards radio, was a natural choice.

What makes this a unique expansion for Central Region is that since late December, Madison County has been served by two NWR systems, operating at different frequencies. The first frequency is our routine transmitter, while the second frequency is operated by the Madison County Emergency Management Agency under the auspices of the CSEP initiative. CSEP is also distributing 10,000 weather radios, specifically designed for the second frequency (operated by Madison emergency management), to people living within a certain distance of the Blue Grass Depot. During normal and severe weather operation, residents will receive the routine NWR programming, tone alarm, and NWR SAME signals on both frequencies. In the event of a chemical accident spill at the depot, those residents in the vicinity of the depot will be alarmed on the second frequency, with additional information included in the broadcast provided by the Madison County Emergency Management Agency.

—Marvin Maddox, MIC, NWSFO Louisville, KY