

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2225

As Reported by House Committee On:
Technology, Energy & Communications

Title: An act relating to a statewide enhanced 911 emergency radio network to improve public notification during an ongoing emergency.

Brief Description: Regarding a statewide enhanced 911 emergency radio network to improve public notification during an ongoing emergency.

Sponsors: Representatives Anderson and Wood.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Energy & Communications: 2/27/07 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a work group to study how to improve the delivery of emergency information to the public in the event of an ongoing emergency.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, ENERGY & COMMUNICATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Morris, Chair; McCoy, Vice Chair; Crouse, Ranking Minority Member; McCune, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Eddy, Ericksen, Hankins, Hudgins, Hurst, Takko and VanDeWege.

Staff: Kara Durbin (786-7133).

Background:

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) was established by the Federal Communications Commission in 1994. It replaced its predecessor, the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS). The EAS is designed to provide the President with a means to address the citizens of the United States in the event of a national emergency. State and local level emergency information may also be transmitted using the EAS.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The EAS may be activated by emergency management agencies at the state or local level and by the National Weather Service. Broadcast stations receive and rebroadcast the EAS messages, but do not initiate activation of the system.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Adjutant General must establish a work group to study how to enhance the delivery of emergency information to the general public in the event of an ongoing emergency.

The workgroup must include the following members:

- two representatives of the Washington State Association of Broadcasters;
- a representative of the Emergency Alert System;
- a representative of the National Weather Service;
- a representative of the Washington Military Department Division of Emergency Management;
- a representative of a local emergency management organization;
- a representative from the 911 advisory committee;
- a representative from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI);
- a representative from the field of higher education;
- a representative of the Department of Transportation; and
- two members of a non-profit, public policy organization comprised of chief executive officers from the business sector.

The work group must consider the following issues:

- how to create a multi-layered, comprehensive, and renewable approach to delivering updated information to the general public;
- how to use existing alert systems to coordinate delivery of updated information;
- how to use the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio system to coordinate delivery of updated information;
- how to create redundancies in the system to ensure that updated information will be available;
- how to improve coordination between the emergency alert system, NOAA weather radio, local broadcast stations, and other existing systems to ensure a seamless transfer of information to the public;
- how to take advantage of modes of communication besides radio and television to add to the multi-layering and redundancy of emergency messaging;
- how to integrate the OSPI notification systems into the emergency notification system;
- how to implement the statewide emergency notification system to ensure immediate availability to 911 public safety answering points for local notifications;
- how to ensure that utilization of the system includes specific information delivery to impacted public officials; and
- what types of information the public needs the most in the aftermath of an emergency.

The Adjutant General must submit a report to the Legislature and the Governor by December 1, 2007, indicating recommendations for enhancing the delivery of emergency information to the public.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill expands the membership of the work group. The substitute bill adds five additional issues for the work group to study: (1) how to use existing alert systems to coordinate delivery of updated information; (2) how to take advantage of other modes of communication besides radio and television; (3) how to integrate the OSPI notification systems into the emergency notification system; (4) how to implement the statewide emergency notification system to ensure its immediate availability to the 911 Public Safety Answering Points for local notifications; and (5) how to ensure that utilization of the system includes specific information delivery to impacted elected officials.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) I appreciate you hearing this bill. During the wind storm last December, one of the key things I learned is that it is difficult to coordinate good information after the emergency to both the public and to emergency management personnel. Radio broadcasters try to provide a sense of community to their listeners, but some don't have access to good, updated information. The public wants to be able to go to a single source and find out where to get medical attention, supplies, fuel, and food. We support this bill. It is a good follow-up on the after action review process that is being conducted at the request of the Governor. Public education and public expectation for services in the aftermath of an emergency is important.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Anderson, prime sponsor; and Sophia Byrd McSherry, Association of Counties.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.