

Did You Know?

Emergency Broadcast/Alert System Broadcast Mistakes Happen

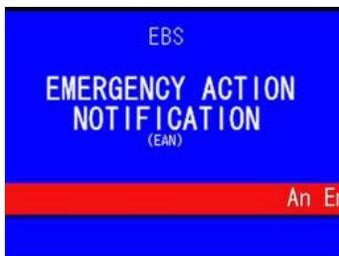


“I hope we never live to see the day when everything is as bad as the news makes it.”

Mark Twain



February 20, 1971 The North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) erroneously transmitted a national level EBS warning message.



As a result, NORAD and its “Attack Warning” function were removed from the EBS. *Since then, only the President can activate the national level EBS.*

On the morning of Saturday, February 20, 1971, Wayland S. Eberhardt, a civilian teletype operator, was going about his routine duties at the National Emergency Warning Center at Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado. One of the functions of

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“the Mountain” during this era was to send out the weekly Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) test directive to the nation’s radio and television stations. They were, of course, also responsible for sending out the real warning. When stations received these messages they compared it against a card to determine what action to take.

At 7:33 a.m. local time on that fateful Saturday, Mr. Eberhardt, a fifteen-year veteran of his job, fed the wrong tape into the transmitter and set off a panic that is remembered to this day. He was later quoted by the New York Times as saying *“I can’t imagine how the hell I did it.”* But he did.



President Nixon did not comment of the gaffe, but his Secretary of State, Melvin Laird, stated that there would be an investigation of what caused the false alert. The Pentagon released this statement that blamed civil defense: *“The Office of Civil Defense is currently investigating the circumstances surrounding the transmittal of the erroneous message.”*

The National Emergency Warning System is located within the NORAD Cheyenne Mountain complex but is not a NORAD function. It is operated by the the U.S. Army’s Strategic Communications Command. This is a civil defense action and not a military one. Louis I. Smoyer, the chief of the warning center, said simply, *“It damn sure won’t happen again. I’ve got to have time to sit up here and figure out how to make this thing fail safe.”*

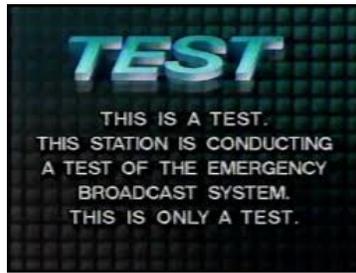
To his credit, Smoyer’s solution did not involve firing the hapless Wayland S. Eberhardt who was described as being “seriously shook up” over his mistake. Rather, the manager had a simple, low-tech remedy: He moved the tapes for the genuine alerts away from the transmitter.



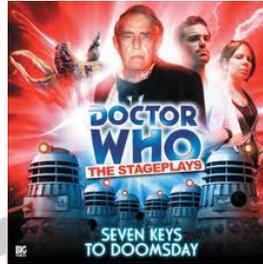
The Greeley (Colorado) Tribune explained the new procedure to its readers on February 23, 1971: *“...In the past three tapes, one for the test and two for actual emergencies, were hanging on three labeled hooks above the transmitter... In the future only the test tape will be left near the transmitter. The two emergency tapes [will be] be sealed in clearly marked envelopes and placed inside a nearby cabinet.”*

This decidedly analog fix seemed to work. And it appears that Mr. Eberhardt lived out the rest of his life in quiet obscurity. He died in Colorado Springs, Colorado on November 20, 1996. But in Cold War trivia circles, he will never be forgotten.

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(www.comlabs.com; <http://www.berniequayle.com/Bernard5.htm>; <http://conelrad.blogspot.com/2010/09/code-word-hatefulness-great-eps-scare.html>; <http://www.comlabs.com/FCKeditor/UserFiles/File/EAS%20Assesment%20%28PPW%29.pdf>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CIZLkEkvyc>)



January 7, 2007 State Officials stated: Federal Government Was Testing a Satellite System, and Inadvertently Activated EAS.



"An emergency alert announced on TV and radio stations in Illinois this morning appears to be the result of a human error in Washington, D.C. Apparently, there's some kind of test being run that shouldn't be going out," Lawrence said. "(IEMA) is getting besieged with phone calls from all over...", "All television channels, including Channel 2 in Chicago, posted an emergency bulletin for District of Columbia and although you could see the news, you could not hear it," viewer Jan Hergesheimer wrote to CBS 2 Tuesday morning. "(It) was pretty scary for about 20 minutes."



(http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2fi8a_emergency-alert-system-activated-by_news)

