

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of
Big Sandy Telecom, Inc.
Operator of Cable Systems in:
Simla, Colorado
Calhan, Colorado
Request for Waiver of Section 11.11(a) of the
Commission's Rules
File No. EB-02-TS-094

ORDER

Adopted: June 18, 2002

Released: June 21, 2002

By the Chief, Technical and Public Safety Division, Enforcement Bureau:

1. In this Order, we grant Big Sandy Telecom, Inc., ("Big Sandy") temporary, 36-month waivers of Section 11.11(a) of the Commission's Rules ("Rules") for the two above-captioned cable television systems. Section 11.11(a) requires cable systems serving fewer than 5,000 subscribers from a headend to either provide national level Emergency Alert System ("EAS") messages on all programmed channels or install EAS equipment and provide a video interrupt and audio alert on all programmed channels and EAS audio and video messages on at least one programmed channel by October 1, 2002.

2. The Cable Act of 1992 added new Section 624(g) to the Communications Act of 1934 ("Act"), which requires that cable systems be capable of providing EAS alerts to their subscribers. In 1994, the Commission adopted rules requiring cable systems to participate in EAS. In 1997, the Commission amended the EAS rules to provide financial relief for small cable systems. The

1 47 C.F.R. § 11.11(a).

2 Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992, Pub. L. No. 102-385, § 16(b), 106 Stat. 1460, 1490 (1992). Section 624(g) provides that "each cable operator shall comply with such standards as the Commission shall prescribe to ensure that viewers of video programming on cable systems are afforded the same emergency information as is afforded by the emergency broadcasting system pursuant to Commission regulations" 47 U.S.C. § 544(g).

3 Amendment of Part 73, Subpart G, of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Broadcast System, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making, FO Docket Nos. 91-171/91-301, 10 FCC Rcd 1786 (1994) ("First Report and Order"), reconsideration granted in part, denied in part, 10 FCC Rcd 11494 (1995).

4 Amendment of Part 73, Subpart G, of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Broadcast System, Second Report and Order, FO Docket Nos. 91-171/91-301, 12 FCC Rcd 15503 (1997) ("Second Report and Order").

Commission declined to exempt small cable systems from the EAS requirements, concluding that such an exemption would be inconsistent with the statutory mandate of Section 624(g).⁵ However, the Commission extended the deadline for cable systems serving fewer than 10,000 subscribers to begin complying with the EAS rules to October 1, 2002, and provided cable systems serving fewer than 5,000 subscribers the option of either providing national level EAS messages on all programmed channels or installing EAS equipment and providing a video interrupt and audio alert on all programmed channels and EAS audio and video messages on at least one programmed channel.⁶ In addition, the Commission stated that it would grant waivers of the EAS rules to small cable systems on a case-by-case basis upon a showing of financial hardship.⁷ The Commission indicated that waiver requests must contain at least the following information: (1) justification for the waiver, with reference to the particular rule sections for which a waiver is sought; (2) information about the financial status of the requesting entity, such as a balance sheet and income statement for the two previous years (audited, if possible); (3) the number of other entities that serve the requesting entity's coverage area and that have or are expected to install EAS equipment; and (4) the likelihood (such as proximity or frequency) of hazardous risks to the requesting entity's audience.⁸

3. Big Sandy filed a request for temporary, 36-month waivers of Section 11.11(a) for the two captioned cable systems on March 13, 2002. In support of its waiver request, Big Sandy states that the two systems are small, rural cable systems serving a total of approximately 405 subscribers. Specifically, Big Sandy indicates that Simla, Colorado serves 178 subscribers and Calhan, Colorado serves 227 subscribers. Based on a price quote provided by an EAS equipment manufacturer, Big Sandy estimates that it would cost approximately \$18,000 to install EAS equipment at this system. Big Sandy asserts that this cost will impose a substantial financial hardship on it and provides its financial statement for 2001 in support of this assertion. In addition, Big Sandy submits that its subscribers will continue to have ready access to national EAS information from other sources, including its cable systems. In this regard, Big Sandy notes that its subscribers currently have access to national EAS messages on approximately half of all programmed channels. Big Sandy also asserts that its subscribers will have access to EAS information through over-the-air reception of broadcast television and radio stations. Therefore, Big Sandy believes that it will be able to fund EAS equipment for the system in the next three years.

4. Based upon our review of the financial data and other information submitted by Big Sandy, we conclude that temporary, 36-month waivers of Section 11.11(a) for the two captioned systems is warranted.⁹ In particular, we find that the estimated \$18,000 cost of EAS equipment for these small cable systems could impose a financial hardship on Big Sandy.

⁵ *Id.* at 15512-13.

⁶ *Id.* at 15516-15518.

⁷ *Id.* at 15513.

⁸ *Id.* at 15513, n. 59.

⁹ The waivers will extend 36 months from October 1, 2002, until October 1, 2005. Big Sandy also specifically requested a waiver of the testing and monitoring requirements of the EAS rules. We clarify that the waivers we are granting also encompass the EAS testing and monitoring requirements.

5. We note that the Commission recently amended the EAS rules to permit cable systems serving fewer than 5,000 subscribers to install FCC-certified decoder-only units, rather than both encoders and decoders, if such a device becomes available.¹⁰ Based on comments from equipment manufacturers, we anticipate that such a decoder-only system could result in significant cost savings to small cable systems.¹¹

6. Accordingly, **IT IS ORDERED** that, pursuant to Sections 0.111, 0.204(b) and 0.311 of the Rules,¹² Big Sandy Telecom, Inc. **IS GRANTED** a waiver of Section 11.11(a) of the Rules until October 1, 2005 for the two captioned cable television systems.

7. **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that Big Sandy Telecom, Inc. place a copy of this waiver in its system files.

8. **IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that a copy of this *Order* shall be sent by Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested to counsel for Big Sandy Telecom, Inc., Christopher C. Cinnamon, Esq., Cinnamon Mueller, 307 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 1020, Chicago, Illinois 60601.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Joseph P. Casey
Chief, Technical and Public Safety Division
Enforcement Bureau

¹⁰ *Amendment of Part 11 of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System*, EB Docket 01-66, FCC 02-64 at ¶ 71 (released February 26, 2002).

¹¹ One manufacturer estimated that an EAS decoder-only system can reduce the cost by 64% over what a cable operator would spend for an encoder/decoder unit. *Id.* at ¶ 70.

¹² 47 C.F.R. §§ 0.111, 0.204(b) and 0.311.