

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6448

As of February 5, 2002

Title: An act relating to the establishment of a statewide all-hazards public warning system requiring all public facilities to use tone alert weather radios.

Brief Description: Establishing an all-hazards public warning system.

Sponsors: Senators Kastama, Shin and Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Economic Development & Telecommunications: 2/5/02.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Staff: William Bridges (786-7424)

Background: The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is used by federal, state, and local governments to broadcast emergency information to the public, such as flood warnings and evacuation plans. It was designed by the Federal Communications Commission and is locally administered by the Washington State Emergency Communications Committee, of which the state Military Department, Emergency Management Division, is a member. All television and radio broadcasters are required to participate in the national EAS. Participation in the state and local EAS is voluntary.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) also operates an emergency radio system called NOAA Weather Radio. This system is primarily used to broadcast weather related warnings and information. NOAA Weather Radio relies on special radios, called tone-alert weather radios, that automatically turn on when a message is broadcast. NOAA Weather Radio currently covers about 65 percent of the state's geography or 95 percent of the state's population.

In most of the United States, EAS warnings can only be heard if a radio or television is turned on. But in the Puget Sound region and the Tri-Cities area, a federal pilot project links the EAS with NOAA Weather Radio. Therefore, governments in those areas may automatically broadcast all-hazard warnings, such as volcanic eruptions, chemical releases, and terrorist attacks, to tone-alert weather radios.

Summary of Bill: An appropriation of \$500,000 is made to the Military Department, Emergency Management Division, to provide the infrastructure for activation of the emergency alert system at state and county levels. In addition, public and private facilities must install, routinely test, and operate tone alert weather radios. "Public and private facilities" include buildings that may have a population of 100 or more people at any time during the day, such as schools, office buildings, and shopping malls.

Appropriation: \$500,000.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.