



## NOAA Weather Radio Recommendation Changes



Fire Safe Occidental (FSO) has been studying, testing and recommending All Hazards NOAA Weather Radios (NWR) since early 2019. Based on these tests we have changed our unqualified recommendation to a qualified one as described below.

The hope and promise of the NWR is that it offers a way to receive Alerts for many different emergencies by using the NOAA National Weather Service radio network that broadcasts information in both spoken voice speech and digitally encoded alert messages (called SAME for Specific Alert Message Encoding). This made NWRs a very valuable backup communication option creating a message path to residents that do not rely on the fixed line or mobile phone systems or access to the Internet. NWRs, coupled with battery backup (which all models tested have as a basic feature,) have a way to communicate to the user when all other electric power-based systems, including the power grid, have failed.

The use of NWRs by the average citizen user relies on three core features once an NWR has been purchased.

1. The most important feature is that good weather radio **reception** exists where the user is;
2. The equipment is **simple** to configure and use so that it is highly unlikely for alerts to fail;
3. **Batteries** are routinely checked for power level enabling operation without electric power.

During FSO's extensive NWR testing, we found concerns in all three areas. (1) We had several instances where it seems there was good weather radio reception but the Alerts broadcast were not recognized by the NWR under test. (2) Even experienced "techies" had several instances of low level "pilot error" in configuring the NWR. (3) Finally, batteries are now even more essential to successful operation as we are now operating in an environment where planned PG&E power grid outages may occur during the very time when the NWR is most likely to receive an Alert. If there is an electrical power outage for any reason lasting for days, an NWR left in operational mode listening for Alerts will consume its batteries very quickly. If there is no power and no backup batteries there can be no Alert received.

All this has led FSO to the conclusion that there must be special efforts taken to guarantee the NWR setup is successful. FSO believes that we can no longer issue a blanket recommendation for all citizens to simply buy an NWR, read our configuration instructions and wait for it to work. Rather, FSO now believes that you should follow the steps below:

- A. Know in advance if you have adequate weather radio reception where you live. Check with nearby neighbors who might be successfully using an NWR, making sure they have successfully tested and received NWR Alerts, or ask FSO to help you find out by testing using FSO-owned NWR equipment.
- B. Follow the FSO provided configuration procedures and do the test specified before assuming you can be confident in receiving Alerts. (If the testing fails or you want help right from the start, ask FSO to help you configure and test your NWR.)
- C. Follow very exactly FSO recommended battery procedures for what to buy and how and when to test.

D. Test the Alert system regularly during fire season. (Each radio allows you to configure it to receive regular weekly tests on Wednesday between 10 and 11 am.)

E. Remember, there is no substitute for being alert and staying aware of what is going on. Staying connected with your neighborhood increases the number of eyes and ears keeping you safe!

The above procedures will greatly increase the likelihood an NWR will work in your home. We will post these modified detailed procedures on the FSO website and send them to you via email soon. Please wait for these before purchasing an NWR.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions at:

[info@FireSafeOccidental.org](mailto:info@FireSafeOccidental.org)



## **Fire Safe Occidental**

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