

TELEVISION QUARTERLY ISSUES-PROGRAMS REPORT

Station: WEAR-TV
Location: Pensacola, FL
Quarter ending: March 31, 2015

ISSUE/description: 13. PUBLIC SAFETY. Informing the public about hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, forest fires, or other life-threatening or property-threatening conditions. Government regulations providing personal safety protection.

How Issue was treated (Program, PSA, etc.):

<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time/Duration</u>	<u>Program type</u>	<u>Description</u>
1. Channel 3 New at 6PM	01/15/15	06:00PM/3 minutes	News	*

* Escambia County stands to lose up to thirty emergency workers in the wake of an IRS audit. Some are volunteer firefighters who hold full-time county jobs. Others are full time firefighters who have second jobs in emergency services. Volunteer firefighters get a small monthly stipend and a 1099 form at the end of the year. But some of those volunteers also hold full-time jobs with the county, for which they get W-2s. The double tax documents drew the attention of the IRS. Mike Weaver/Public Safety Director "We were trying to do a good practice, and there's just some new laws, and some things brought to light that it wasn't, and to be honest and legal these are some things we are going to have to do to make things right." The feds decided that the volunteer firefighters should have been classified as employees and had their taxes withheld. In a settlement agreement, the county agreed to do that starting January first. They also agreed to stop the practice of employees working two jobs for the county. Volunteers who have done well over 20 or 30 years of working in different roles are going to have to resign one position or another. That choice also faces some paid firefighters, who work second jobs on ambulances. Weaver says they'll get it done, and the public won't have any difference in service.

2. Channel 3 New at 10PM	01/15/15	10:06PM/2 minutes	News	**
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** After the scandal involving former Okaloosa County Tourism Development Director Mark Bellinger, the state's Auditor General made a list of 25 things that Okaloosa County needed to change about the way they handled their finances. Amongst them; how Okaloosa County lifeguards are paid. And that change, if implemented, could cost county taxpayers. Okaloosa spent nearly 3.7 million dollars from bed tax funds on lifeguards from 2010-2014. The state wanted the county to pay back a fairly large sum of money from our general revenue fund to our Tourist Development fund, to pay back for expenses incurred for life safety on the beach, in particular, life guards, according to County Commissioner Nathan Boyles. County Administrator John Hofstad says the county was told by the State Auditor to ask the state Attorney General about paying lifeguards from bed tax money. He says they have no plans to do so. Hofstad says other counties already pay lifeguards from bed taxes, and that Okaloosa should be allowed to do the same. Commissioner Nathan Boyles feels the same. He says if the state does rule it a non-allowable use, it could have a negative impact on residents of the county. We'd have to raise property taxes on local citizens to pay for that service, or we'd have to discontinue lifeguards on the beach, and then we'd have unsafe beaches." The county commission will review all 25 suggestions and changes at their meeting next Tuesday.

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3. Channel 3 New First at 4	01/20/15	04:33PM/3 minutes	News	***

*** Low humidity over the weekend contributed to a spate of fires that required action from Florida Forest Service firefighters. Another contributing factor was backyard burns gone wrong. FFS crews responded to five wildfires Sunday and Monday and were cancelled while en route to several others. Of the five, three were caused by escaped yard trash fires. Escaped yard debris burns – burning of tree trimmings, small brush and other vegetation – accounted for more than 20% of the wildfires in the Blackwater District (Escambia, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa counties) in 2014. We spoke with Joe Zwierzchowski, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist for Blackwater. “We work very hard to educate people on the safest ways possible to burn yard debris, when is the best time to do it and what conditions are less dangerous.” Any person conducting a yard trash burn that escapes can be held liable for the cost to suppress the resulting wild fire. Depending on the size and severity of the fire, the costs can mount rapidly. We gave viewers several tips and requirements to keep in mind before burning yard waste.

4. Channel 3 New at 5PM	01/23/15	05:04PM/2 minutes	News	****
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**** Living on the gulf coast, many of us are familiar with the power of hurricanes. And when a storm is threatening us, we rely on around the clock information to stay safe. That's where hurricane hunters come in, flying into the eye of the storm. When a hurricane is approaching land, the squadron takes their C-130 into the places we run away from to gather information. Director of Operations Keith Gibson says it's a little nerve wracking. A crew of five people: pilot, co-pilot, navigator, meteorologist, and weather reconnaissance loadmaster fly directly into the hurricane to gather data and send it to the National Hurricane Center, who relays the information to the public. These missions last hours, covering thousands of miles, and keeping us up to date every minute on the storm's developments with weather instruments inside and outside the aircraft. Hurricane season starts June 1st.

5. Channel 3 New at 10PM	01/30/15	10:05PM/2 minutes	News	*****
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***** Last year, Escambia County was told by the IRS that there was a problem with the way they were handling monthly stipends to volunteer firefighters. They learned that county employees who were also volunteer firefighters might be unable to continue volunteering. Today, Friday, multiple fire chiefs and fire officials sat with county administration to discuss the future of those volunteers. One fire chief said he'll be losing at least two volunteers, and others had concerned it could be more. The county has already determined that county employees working in emergency roles, like EMS technicians, will not be able to continue volunteering. However, they do have hopes that state officials will allow those working in other roles and departments to continue. The county has already reached a settlement with the IRS for the back taxes in 2012, which protects them from penalties from 2013 and 2014. It also prevents the volunteers who were paid incorrectly from owing taxes out of pocket. However, Escambia County Fire Marshals are still fighting for non-emergency service volunteers to be allowed to continue fighting fires. There are as many as a dozen volunteers who are still waiting to be told whether they can continue that service. Fire chiefs say if not, they'll be immediately pressed to find more volunteers to replace them.

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6. Channel 3 News - Dayside	03/24/15	11:00AM/2 minutes	News	*****

***** Several local emergency response agencies participated in a training drill Tuesday that simulated a plane crash in Escambia Bay. Anthony Pura reported live from the site of the 1978 plane crash in the bay. First responders practiced the procedures they would use during a real plane crash. They went out into Escambia Bay to find the staged crash site, then brought in and treated "survivors," who were played by actors. The agencies will meet again next week to evaluate their performance. The drill is part of annual training that is required by the Federal Aviation Administration.

7. Channel 3 New at 10PM	03/25/15	10:20PM/3 minutes	News	*****
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***** There have been two deadly car accidents involving teens just this week in Northwest Florida. Then a study released Wednesday by AAA said that teenage drivers have the highest crash rate of any group in the United States. The study also points to distractions like cell phones or other people in the car as the cause of more than half of teen crashes. Lieutenant Preston from the Florida Highway Patrol could not confirm that distractions played a role in the two deadly car accidents involving teens this week, but he said that texting and other things that take your mind off the road continue to be dangerous for teenage drivers. "It doesn't take long," said Lieutenant Preston. "The average time that it takes to send the average text at 55 MPH, you've traveled the length of a football field."