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August 11, 1976

SUBJECT:

RADAR TRANSMITTER BREAK

The AP reported yesterday that a broken radar transmitter may have caused a delayed warning for residents in Big Thompson Canyon prior to the flooding there that killed at least 89 people. Robert Beck of NOAA confirmed that the transmitter was broken and may have cost "some precision" in gauging the intensity of the storm.

What is the Administration going to do about the transmitter break? Doesn't this raise the possibility that the Federal Government may well be responsible for the deaths of a great many of the people who apparently received no warning?

GUIDANCE: Let me recap for you the facts of this situation. The equipment in question was a device that transmits an image of expected weather conditions on a radar screen to the forecasters office, where the forecast is transmitted to paper and can be noted and put on the air by the forecaster.

On the night of the flood, the transmitter was in fact not operating, and the result was that the forecaster had to receive verbal reports from the radar operator. However, the radar itself was operating, and the radar operator and forecaster were in constant contact.

In any case, the matter of insufficient warning is being investigated by the Commerce Department (in which NOAA is housed), and we will then be better able to judge how much, if any, delay existed.

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