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The mushroom cloud from "Elvy Mike" rises above in the Marshall Islands in 1952. (Photo: AP)

Many Californians' regularly scheduled broadcasts were interrupted Thursday morning with strange emergency messages warning of extraterrestrial invasions and the beginning of Armageddon. The bizarre warnings aired on TVs in the Orange County area, affecting Cox and Spectrum cable users, according to the Orange County Register.

One video of the broadcast uploaded to YouTube includes a terrified, breathless voice saying: "The space program made contact with... They are not what they claim to be. They have infiltrated a lot of, uh, a lot of aspects of military establishment, particularly Area 51. The disasters that are coming 'the military' 'I'm sorry the government knows about them..."

Gizmodo found that the audio comes from a call that Art Bell, the host of the conspiracy theory-themed radio show Coast to Coast AM, received in 1997 from a man claiming to be a former Area 51 employee.

Other videos of the emergency broadcast feature a different voice warning that "extremely violent times will come."

- Redditor smittenkitten77 discovered the audio came from the Christian radio program Insight for Living with Chuck Swindoll.

"It almost sounded like Hitler talking," one Cox customer told the Register. "It sounded like a radio broadcast coming through the television."

It's still unclear whether the messages were broadcast intentionally or by accident, but broadcast signal intrusions by pranksters aren't unheard of, even in the digital era. Most famously, still-unidentified hackers hijacked TV signals in the Chicago area in 1987, broadcasting footage of a person wearing a Max Headroom mask and a man's bare buttocks being spanked with a flyswatter. More recently, a suspect was arrested in 2013 after allegedly overlaying broadcasts in several states with emergency alerts about dead bodies "rising from their graves."

Cox spokesperson Todd Smith told Gizmodo that the company does not know how many customers were affected and is still trying to determine where the originating signal came from. Cox believes its system got the message after a radio station or multiple stations were conducting their monthly emergency test, which cable networks piggyback on. Usually, radio stations transmit an end "tone" to complete their alerts. However, this time, it seems no such tone was transmitted.

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