

Clay's Corner for August 2011

It's hard to believe, 2011 has only 4 months to go, Full of good news...Huh?

On the personal side - I am finally getting used to Windows 7 and Word 2010. Big changes for a guy that only makes upgrades every 10 years and does so only when things get ugly. The other noteworthy item is that I have now been employed, full time, in broadcasting 50 years. Started at KFHA in Tacoma August 1, 1961. That's a very long time to be in this crazy business. I keep thinking of how I have been in this biz longer than most I deal with have been around. I have to say that broadcasting, generally, has been good to me. Frankly, I never thought I'd last this long, nor still be working. Then again, I really don't know how to do anything else.

Our SBE Chapter had another great picnic at the historic KOMO-AM Transmitter plant on Vashon Island. Was great to see people in attendance from as far away as Pt Townsend, Portland, Oregon and Philadelphia, Pa. Before I forget it. A huge thank you to Shannon Nichols and the crew of BSW for again sponsoring the event and KOMO for providing a great location.

Looking at what's newzy -

Lots of interest in the FCC process of making changes to the EAS Rules. Several groups and manufacturers have made comments. I have been involved with a group called the BWWG. You can read our comments, and those of the others, via the FCC. One common theme from NAB, NASBA and BWWG - - delay the deadline 6 more months please. Many are having a hard time understanding how you can require equipment be purchase prior to the governing rules being adopted. Meanwhile, I have been working on updating a number of our State's EAS doc's. A number of changes coming. Again I extend the invitation to get involved with the EAS system, either locally or at the state level...If you are interested, drop me a note etc. If you really want to be up to date on what's shaking in the world of EAS, here's my invitation to Join the EAS Forum. Go here for more info - <http://lists.radiolists.net/mailman/listinfo/eas>

The Feds continue to look at broadcast spectrum as a place to make money. This issue is now involving powerful senators and congressmen. Broadcasters, thankfully, have some allies in WDC. NAB has analyzed the issue and found that the Feds broadband plan could cause over 200 full power TV stations to go dark and 40% would have to either leave the business or find a new channel. Interesting that the study showed that stations in 'northern border areas' (including Seattle) would be 'severely impacted'. I never thought that I'd see the day when broadcasters are having to fight to keep their spectrum

As another expression of love of Broadcasting... The FCC is out with their new rate-card for what they call 'regulatory fees'. Looks like prices are going up about 4.6 percent. Just what broadcasters need. But in the era of government attitude about broadcasting, I guess it's to be expected

The FCC has been busy with enforcement – Here are some actions that I found interesting....

In Wasilla Alaska (yep, same town as Sarah Palin) an FCC inspection showed the station did not have adequate fencing around their tower. Problem was the ground was frozen solid and there was 3 feet of snow and they had erected temporary fencing to try and warn the public. The FCC bought the argument and the 7K-Buck fine they were thinking of did not take place.

In San Jose, California, the FCC slapped the operator of a pirate station with a huge fine that ought to send a powerful message. In this case – 25 Grand !...Perhaps some have not gotten the word?

In North Carolina a radio station (KGTM-AM) ended up also facing a 25 Kilobuck fine. In this case, the station was licensed, however, an inspection turned up a number of serious problems.....Like no EAS Equipment or public file etc. How could they have not known?

In Miami there has been a pirate operating on 95.9...complete with a website. The FCC tracked down the culprit but the operator refused to permit an inspection of the station (not wise) and was issued an NOAL back in March. The station continues to operate and the price has now gone up to 22 Grand.

KBPO in Texas will be contributing 25Grand, not as a result of what the inspector found, but rather because the place was locked and vacant during several attempted visits.

In a nice demonstration of how fair the FCC is when it comes to violations and fines, the Feds recently fined WSCS-FM, licensed to a small college, 10 K-Bucks. The infraction, missing items from their Public File.

Our State Capital has its share of pirate radio stations. I observed one the other day on 98.5 while driving thru town. Could hear the mono-FM operation from Lacey to south of Tumwater ...pretty decent coverage. Understand there are others. I can't help but think of those states that have passed laws making this type of thing illegal giving the FCC much needed help. There are those that thought the FCC might be upset with states getting involved in what has historically been their turf, however, they are, apparently, happy to get the help.

From the 'gee have we not been down this road before dept.' ATSC has come out with new information covering TV audio in response to what's called the CALM Act (Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation Act) The document is available at the ATSC site – www.atsc.org. (I still recall the CBS Labs Dynamic Loudness Controller)

For some time now the NAB has been pushing the idea of having FM radios in cell phones. The reason for the push is obvious – More radios is good for broadcasting. One of the big arguments has been that radios in cell phones can distribute emergency information to their users. The cellular industry has, as one can suspect, been very cool to the idea. Now a new

survey indicates that among the 17% of cell phone users that already have FM radios built in almost 60% don't use it.

Remember when the FCC said OK to the merging of the two satellite radio outfits? The Commish feared that this would be an excuse for the new company to jack up prices and hurt the consumer. Well, that's over now and the FCC has un-frozen their rates. Since that time the number of subscribers has grown considerably, perhaps to the point that they will soon test the waters with a rate increase?

The dashboard of the automobile is a constant battleground for those that want some of the attention of drivers (not too much of course). Back when I started in this biz, car radios were an option and if you wanted a radio, you had a choice of an AM only. FM in car radios was unheard of. Actually I had a little FM tuner that was inserted in the antenna lead of my 63 bug, I carefully hit it in the glove compartment. Later, thanks to Japanese cars coming with standard AM/FM Radios, things began to change. Soon we had 4 track and later 8 track. That was replaced with cassettes and then CD's and now, of course, MP3's. Ford has announced that they are now going to phase out the CD player. Oh yes, my present car radio (In my truck) is an after-market device with – HD Radio, CD Player, external audio inputs, USB connector etc etc.

You don't hear much about issues involving RF Radiation at transmitter sites these days. Certainly it was a huge issue a few years ago. Well, it's back! This time allegations are being made of excessive RFR on Mt Wilson, the huge transmitter site near Los Angeles. AndThere is a Northwest Connection. Several of the major broadcasters have gotten together and retained our very own Hatfield and Dawson to conduct a detailed survey of the situation.

The end of analog TV took another step forward with the FCC creating a hard-date for LPTV stations to make the switch. Sept 1, 2015 is the date when all LPTV and TV Translators must end analog operation. It's going to be interesting to see how many operators of these facilities actually pony up the bucks to make the conversion. In looking at the EAS Monitoring Assignments in our state, I have noted that a number of these smaller TV's are reportedly not on the air.

A huge, multiple use, tower caught fire and collapsed in the Netherlands. Video of the failure was transmitted, world-wide, via You-Tube. Apparently there was a fire involving the transmission lines causing the structure to look like a giant smoke stack before the top of the structure folded over and fell to the ground. There have been similar events involving cell towers, however not likely from the same cause. From what I understand, the Dutch tower fire may have been caused by heating of a transmission line due to a bad match. The jackets on semi-flexible transmission line can certainly catch fire if the internal heat is hot enough. The only place around here that has a bunch of high powered, semi-flexible, transmission lines in a big pipe is the Ratelco FM Master Antenna on Cougar. If I recall correctly, the outer jacket of those lines was removed.

In this country, during the past month, we have had our share of weather related broadcast issues. A big tower fell in Minnesota and there were a number of stations forced off the air due to flooding.

Around the country there are still stories being written about copper thefts. Some involving live power lines. The big metal theft in our area recently was in Mukilteo. In this case someone stole 25 tons of metal from a business there. The metal was scrap and was worth about 10 Grand.

Nationwide, electrical substations have been hit some 48,000 times in just the last year. One of our local electrical utilities, Puget Sound Energy, is busy installing motion detectors and cameras in an effort to catch the thieves in the act. We wish them luck.

On the subject of PSE, I am reminded that there is a rush to complete an extension of the existing PSE power line on West Tiger before the snow flies. It's been determined that the original power line serving the site built by Viacom back in 1987 days are numbered and rather than replace it, an extension from the existing ATC site on the east end of West Tiger is the best bet. Until then, we are all keeping our fingers crossed.

One of the most popular ways to stretch the dollar in TV is by what's known as Centralcasting. Generally this means having one, highly automated, master control operation control a number of TV stations. For many years stations in Tri-Cities and Yakima have been doing this. More recently a 3 station system is coming on line in Eastern Washington. This one involves KHQ in Spokane, KNDO in Yakima and KNDU in Yakima. In this situation there are other players, Comcast and Charter Cable are providing the fiber to connect the parts with a 100 mbps loop, or ring. The center of the operation will be in Spokane where, all together, they will be dealing with 7 channels. The system has been in the works for the last 3 years.

Another trend worth watching is the coming together of Radio and TV news operations. Certainly here in Seattle we have KOMO doing this, in house, with their TV and Radio operations. KIRO Radio works with KING-TV etc. In some recent cases, in other markets, radio stations are becoming all news operations and are working with existing TV news departments to help pull it off. In some areas, major local TV newscasts are being carried live by the partnering radio station.

The annual radio Marconi Award finalists have been named. In looking through the list for PNW stations and names I only spotted one from our area.... KIRO-FM was nominated for News-Talk Station of the Year.

Not exactly great timing considering the recent ownership battle... Fisher announced that Q2 radio revenue was down about 5%....On the good side, cash flow margin was up.

The FCC appears to be moving forward with what's called the Local Community Radio Act (LCRA?). In my view it should be called the LCAMSAWCITFMB. Roughly translated as – Lets

Cram As Many Stations As We Can In The FM Band. The FCC, bowing to pressure from those that have fought long and hard to cram low powered stations on 2nd adjacent channels because we all know we need more radio stations. History is repeating itself – again. Long ago the FCC did something very similar to the AM band. The results are there for all to observe. However we need to remember that the FCC is not there to protect technical performance as much as it is to react to pressure for more stations. There might be a silver lining here. With stations on every possible frequency, there will be less open space for pirates.

A sure sign that the year is getting long in the tooth...NAB just put out a call for speakers for the 2012 show in Las Vegas. Deadline to submit presentations is Oct 21.

Time to leave you with this item about those that collect and restore old broadcast equipment.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89G3_XqM28U

And for that of you that can't stand the sound of modern solid-state stereo amps and long for the glow of vacuum tubes ...and have a few extra bucks laying around. (Thanks Dwight and Kent)

<http://www.audiopowerlabs.com/>

and

<http://www.stereophile.com/tubepoweramps/704wavac/>

That's it for this month- Thanks all for the read!

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