



COMMUNICATIONS

by Ken Reitz



SHORTWAVE/AMATEUR RADIO

CA Hams Aid in Rescue

According to a report on KCAL CBS2, Los Angeles, two hams, a husband and wife from the Los Angeles area, were checking on a ham club repeater on a hill on Catalina Island when they spotted an injured man who had fallen 40 feet to rocks below. The two had their handi-talkies and called in the emergency to hams on the mainland who called 911. An officer from the Malibu-Lost Hills sheriff's office credited the two with quick thinking and operator know-how that saved the man's life.

WWCR Programs Linked to Investigations

The Minneapolis-St. Paul *Star Tribune* reported October 28 about a complicated currency trading scheme involving millions of dollars and dozens of investors that, so far, has attracted investigations from the SEC, FBI, the Commodities and Futures Trading Commission as well as a federal grand jury and assorted officials from the state of Minnesota.



The investigations began when a group of nine investors from Ohio sued in Minnesota to recover the nearly \$5 million they had invested in a currency program apparently promoted by two Minnesota-based radio talk-show hosts, Jerry Watkins and Pat Kiley. According to the report, Watkins, who had hosted a WWCR show called "Your Money Matters," was promoting the investment scheme even while awaiting sentencing in Minneapolis for involvement in an unrelated scheme that scammed investors out of \$20 million.

According to the *Star Tribune* report, investigators were also looking into a company known as Universal Brokerage with which Kiley, who hosted the ironically titled WWCR show "Follow the Money," was associated. Several other individuals were tied in with similarly sounding "investment" firms, most located in Minnesota. Both programs no longer air on WWCR but, as of press time, WWCR's web site continued to provide a link to Kiley's web page.

AM/FM/TV BROADCASTING

FCC Extends LPFM Deadline

In October the FCC announced a filing window for applications for new Low Power FM (LPFM) licenses between December 11 and the 18th. After requests from numerous non-profit

groups, the FCC announced in early November that the window has been moved. The filing window for non-commercial educational allotments on channels 221 through 300 (92.1 - 107.9 MHz) is now open from February 19 and closes February 26, 2010.

Death of Over-the-Air TV?

The VHF-TV spectrum, made available by vacating America's analog TV stations, hasn't even been tinkered with before parties wishing to take it all have started clamoring for the UHF-TV band as well. TV Technology.com noted in early November that an economic report, filed with the FCC by the Consumer Electronics Association, argues that there are so few people watching over-the-air "free" TV that the vast swath of valuable spectrum real estate could be more profitably used by other interests eager to exploit the frequencies that are perfect for subscription-based Internet access and other streaming enterprises.

The day after that report was filed, a group called the Association for Maximum Service Television (MSTV) and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) responded with their own comments. They argued, according to TV Technology.com, that TV broadcasters already have given up 25% of their originally assigned spectrum and, thanks to advanced digital compression technology, are doing considerably more with a whole lot less.



White Space Network Test in VA

One such potential player in the "white space" land rush is Spectrum Bridge, a privately held company based in Lake Mary, Florida, that plans to exploit the former VHF-TV band. It is currently operating a test station (WF2XCG) in rural Claudville, Virginia, on a frequency of former VHF-TV channel 8. According to TV Technology.com, the test is being done at 2 watts output and effectively covering the whole county and providing Internet access via the special transmitter and antenna. Because the frequency terrain is so well known, it was possible to design much of the technology for the experiment with existing VHF-TV-related equipment.

SATELLITES

Space Debris to Increase Mission Costs

ABC News reported in early November that the amount of space debris will figure large in the cost of launching and maintaining future space

missions. The story quotes a British report that predicts near misses will increase 50 percent in the next 10 years and 250 percent by 2059 causing more than 50,000 close encounters per week. That prompted the U.S. Joint Space Command, which tracks 800 satellites daily, to announce it would increase tracking to 1,300 satellites.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Rescuers Wary of "Yuppie Rescues"

An Associated Press story from California, detailing the "rescue" of two men and their teenage sons, highlight a new hazard for rescue teams. The widespread use of inexpensive, and too easy to use, personal locator beacons and other devices have brought many unprepared adventurers into wilderness locations they don't belong. Incidents of misuse of the devices have led them to be dubbed "Yuppie 911" by some rescuers, according to the AP article.



In the above related story, the group had used their personal locator beacon three times in the course of a weekend causing mobilization of rescue teams and a helicopter, only to find the group really didn't have an emergency. The third time out the rescuers forced the group onto the helicopter, took them out of the area and cited the leader with "creating a hazard condition" for the rescue teams.

Guard with Scanner Captures Crooks

The Salt Lake City *Desert News* reported in late October about a couple who had allegedly robbed a restaurant and made good their escape, despite having the scene of the crime surrounded by police with K-9 units. But, when an alert private security guard at a nearby apartment complex, who had been monitoring the action on a police scanner, checked on a suspicious-looking couple in a car in the complex, he spotted what looked like a cash box in the back of the car. The guard called in to the official police, who by this time had given up looking for the pair, to make the arrest.

Scanner Listeners Aid Police

An article in the Bay City (MI) *Times* told the story of a suspect in an alleged assault trying to elude police in his tractor trailer rig. But, the police were aided by citizens listening to developments unfold on their scanners and reporting the whereabouts of the driver via cell phone. According to the article, a police spokesman said, "Deputies involved want to thank the

citizens who called in after observing the suspect vehicle for their assistance in putting an end to the incident.”

Carjacker Stopped by OnStar

High-speed police chases are very popular in California, especially Los Angeles where at least one local TV station has a section of their home page devoted to them. Viewers can tune in as the station’s helicopter provides thrilling live feeds of chases in progress. But last year, according to MSNBC, 334 people were killed nationwide in such incidents including five officers and 77 innocent bystanders.



Now, the vehicle onboard communications service OnStar is offering a “shut down” option to its service that can disable a vehicle at the owner’s request. The service was used in late October when a high-jacked car in LA sped off for the traditional high-speed freeway chase. The owner authorized OnStar to shut down the vehicle which coasted to a stop in middle of a street. The shocked carjacker took off on foot, jumped a nearby privacy fence and landed directly in one of LA’s ubiquitous backyard pools.

FCC ENFORCEMENT

Parade of Manufacturer Missteps

Midland Radio Corporation, which had earlier been hit with a \$21,000 Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture (NAL) for making General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) transmitters with “a voice scrambling feature,” a feature not allowed by FCC rules, has had the NAL cancelled, according to FCC documents.



Midland and the FCC signed a Consent Decree that spelled out future company actions including the appointment of a “compliance officer” to work with the FCC to insure compliance with FCC rules and regulations and the regular filing of compliance reports with the Commission over a two year period. But, they’re not completely off the hook. The agreement also states that Midland will make a “voluntary” contribution of \$14,000 to the U.S. Treasury.

Meanwhile, Uniden America was hit with a \$23,000 NAL for the same design feature issue. There is reason to expect that their NAL will also be reduced and that they, too, will be making a voluntary contribution to the U.S. Treasury.

The FCC sent an NAL in the amount of \$7,000 to R.F. Technologies for selling belt-pack transceivers, such as used by employees at fast food restaurants, without receiving FCC certification.



Richfield Electronics, a Chinese electronics manufacturer, was hit with an \$18,000 fine for selling whole house FM transmitters that had originally been FCC certified, but whose design had been changed following certification so that there was a significant increase in the effective radiated power of the device.

FCC Scuttles Pirate Cat Radio

Bad news greeted San Francisco radio listeners tuning into 87.9 MHz expecting to hear Pirate Cat Radio (PCR) as they had for the previous 13 years. The FCC had just sent an NAL to PCR operator, Daniel Roberts, known on-air as “Monkey,” for \$10,000. According to FCC documents, the Commission had earlier sent Roberts several Notices of Unlicensed Operation (NOUOs) for PCR activities over the past few years.

This past April FCC agents took field strength measurements and determined that the station was operating at 10,000 times the maximum power allowed under FCC Part 15 rules. That same day, according to FCC documents, “...agents observed Roberts operating and controlling the unlicensed radio station on 87.9 MHz from the Pirate Cat Café and Studio...[and] identified Roberts as the voice on the unlicensed transmissions on 87.9 MHz.” That couldn’t have been too hard to do, since PCR operates openly at street level in the Pirate Cat Café publicly open to all. The real question is: Did the agents get a Pirate Cat Café maple/bacon latte? The fine was set at \$10,000.



For its part, PCR immediately ceased on-air operations following receipt of the NAL, though it continues to stream its programming via the PCR website. PCR also issued a statement on its web site citing the station’s battle against, “...corporate-run media monopolies and monocultural programming.” Speaking for the station, Monkey stated, “...we made the collective decision that Pirate Cat Radio must come off the public airwaves until some method is found to change the law or get it authorized under existing law.”

While PCR publicly retreated from its official on-air presence, FM broadcasts of the station’s web-feed have apparently been heard from various locations. Monkey told one reporter, “The FCC can’t come to you if someone else decides to start broadcasting your Internet radio station. Nothing shows that I broadcast all those transmitters.” Sounds like there could be a movie contract in kitty’s future.

Florida Pirate Fine Reduced

Last year a man from Lakeland, Florida who was operating a pirate radio station, also on 87.9 MHz, and who had originally been fined \$10,000 for his activities, has now had that fine reduced to \$2,500. Originally caught in the act of operating the illegal station, the owner, according to FCC documents, “...admitted he did not have a license to operate on 87.9 MHz, but stated that on an unspecified date and time he spoke to an unidentified person at the FCC who told him it was okay to broadcast as long as no one complained and there was no interference.” Agents had measured the output of his station at more than 5,000 times the maximum allowed for a Part 15 transmitter.

Texas FM Pirate: Not Ruled by FCC

An Austin, Texas man, who broadcast news sources reported was a retired sheriff, had been

operating a pirate FM stations from his home and was issued an NAL for \$10,000 by the FCC for such operation. According to FCC documents, field agents had earlier measured the station’s signal as being 13,000 times the maximum allowed for an unlicensed operation.

While the man didn’t deny any of the facts in the case and stated that he had “...ceased all transmissions and has no plans to transmit in the future,” he claimed that “...as a citizen of the Republic of Texas,

he is not subject to the laws of the United States or the Commission’s rules.” Further, he asserted that the Commission’s licensing policies violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Surely there’s a judicial award for his curious defense: claiming simultaneous states’ sovereignty and federal protection. Citing extensive legal precedent, the FCC dismissed the man’s claim and stood by their fine.

“Communications” is compiled by Ken Reitz KS4ZR (kenreitz@monitoringtimes.com) from news clippings and links supplied by our readers. Many thanks to this month’s fine reporters: Anonymous, Rachel Baughn, Pat Clawson, Richard Dillman, Norman Hill, Bob Margolis, John Mayson, and Larry Van Horn.

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