



COMMUNICATIONS

by Ken Reitz



AMATEUR RADIO/SHORTWAVE

Radio Response to Haitian Quake

The devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in mid-January brought quick reaction from the amateur radio community. With cell towers down, land lines destroyed and power to commercial stations limited, ham radio was among the first to report the scale of destruction to the outside world. John Henault, HH6JH, a priest in Port Au Prince, operating on emergency battery power, was said to be the first to describe the aftermath of the earthquake. Amateur operations received widespread coverage in U.S. media because of its first-responder role.

The Salvation Army was quick to set up HF operations when their Salvation Army Team Emergency Radio Network (SATERN) took over 14.265 MHz in the 20 meter ham band. Other frequencies on 40 and 80 meters, to cover the area during nighttime propagation, were also established. The International Assistance and Traffic Net (14.300 MHz), normally handling maritime traffic throughout the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean, was also available for emergency traffic.



Destruction following the earthquake in Haiti. (Courtesy: SATERN)

The extensive Haitian community in the New York City metro area turned to a number of area radio stations for the latest information on the disaster in French and Creole, though some programming was also heard in English. Most of these stations are subcarrier authorization (SCA) broadcasts, identified incorrectly in some media reports as pirate radio stations, which have been on the air serving the local Haitian community for years. Among them are Radio Optimum and Radio Pa Nou, both from Brooklyn, New York and Radio Éclair on Long Island.

Florida's estimated 500,000 Haitians had a variety of AM/FM, SCA and on-line stations to tune into during the crises, including Radio Haiti Tropicale (Orlando); Radio Ideal FM (Ft. Lauderdale), and Radio Independence (Ft. Myers). Listeners found solace among those calling-in to express their concern about the health and welfare of family members in the aftermath of the quake.



Salvation Army Haiti Divisional Commander Major Lucien Lamartiniere (left) speaks with Disaster Services Director Bob Poff (right). (Courtesy: Salvation Army)

Radio Prague Bemoans End of SW

An extensive article on the Radio Prague web site (www.radio.cz/en/article/124187) provided a sober analysis of the future for shortwave broadcasting from the point of view of Radio Prague. Part of the analysis is that energy costs and a dwindling audience, seeking newer, more reliable reception (Internet streaming, podcasting and satellite radio, for example), have conspired to make shortwave broadcasting more expensive and thus, less cost effective, than ever. The article explained that statistics gleaned from the Radio Prague web site show that some 500,000 podcasts are downloaded from their website monthly while it has no way of knowing how many people are listening to their shortwave broadcasts at anytime.

Radio Evangelist Sentenced to 175 Years

A number of news outlets, including the *Associated Press* and the *Kansas City Star* reported last November the sentencing of radio evangelist Tony Alamo, whose ministry programs had been widely heard, according to his ministry web site, on U.S. AM outlets as well as shortwave stations WWCR and WINB. Alamo was convicted on sex charges relating to underage girls and sentenced to serve 175 years in a federal prison. In mid-January a federal judge ordered the 75 year-old preacher to pay each of his "teen brides" one-half million dollars each, though the government had sought \$2.7 million apiece. Alamo remains in prison pending an appeal on the original conviction while his ministry, according to his web site, remains quite active.

PIRATE RADIO UPDATE

The lure of unlicensed broadcasting is universal, with an uncountable number of pirate radio stations staking out frequencies on the FM band all over the world. The complaint

among pirate broadcasters is nearly universal: limited access to the band creates money-making monopolies that don't reflect the communities they're licensed to serve, regardless of which country that may be.

One way to defy the licensing system is to put a signal on the air without a license. The risk is that government powers will shut down such operations and participants will be faced with heavy fines and/or jail. But, in the U.S., jail time is rarely imposed and fines, when levied, are often reduced. Additionally, FCC enforcement apparatus, stretched thin in budget and personnel, works at a very deliberate pace. FM pirates may operate for years before the first warning letter, a Notice of Unlicensed Operation (NOUO), is issued.

Most U.S. FM pirates enjoy apparent immunity, that is, until agents of the FCC show up at the door asking questions. But, some pirate broadcasters don't get the kid glove treatment, instead, the FCC sometimes shows up with heavily armed local police units and the pirates are forcibly arrested.

It may seem that the FCC prefers to tackle FM pirates while leaving HF pirates alone. But, FM pirates are targeted because they, unlike their shortwave counterparts whose transmissions are relatively short and harder to locate through direction-finding techniques, often operate around the clock and just as often with announced addresses. So, they're the proverbial low hanging fruit.

Even worse for FM pirates, their signals often interfere with legitimate broadcasters who waste no time filing complaints with the FCC. Still, inexpensive and easy to operate FM transmitters of 100 watts or more are widely available and sold daily on the Internet. In other words, FM piracy in the U.S. is spreading considerably faster than the FCC can possibly cope. What follows are five recent stories of pirate radio operations around the world.

3,000 Spanish Pirate Stations Targeted

Andy Sennitt reported on his *Radio Netherlands Worldwide* blog, Media Network (<http://blogs.rnw.nl/medianetwork>), that Spain's State Radio Communications Agency will look into the operations of some 3,000 unlicensed FM broadcasters said to be operating throughout Spain. According to his report, pirate broadcasters outnumber licensed radio stations in some areas by as much as three to one. The agency will attempt to close 482 stations in the Canary Islands alone. These stations are said to be mostly English broadcasters catering to vacationing Brits, but crowding out licensed Spanish language broadcasters.

IC & RCMP Pull Plug on Teenage Pirate (Literally!)

Several Canadian media sources reported in December the antics of a teenage boy who was operating his own pirate FM station in the Ottawa area and attracting a lot of listeners with a reported Effective Radiated Power (ERP) of some 3,000 watts. After receiving a letter to cease broadcast operations from Industry Canada (I.C., that country's broadcast licensing body) the youth did so, but cranked up the transmitter again on Christmas Eve. Following receipt of another such letter, the station went silent again. By January 15, the kid was once more at it, but this time IC had heard enough. With the assistance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the station was raided and the broadcast equipment was removed. Well, they found the antenna, but had trouble locating the transmitter. The station is currently heard only on the Internet, but, the youngster had vowed to return to the air one way or another.

Taiwanese Government v. FM Pirates

A report in the *Malaysian Insider* decried the existence of "underground" unlicensed FM radio stations in Taiwan that peddle "dubious drugs and extreme political views." According to the report, drugs believed to combat a variety of ailments are offered through on-air advertisements. The article noted that there could be as many as 200 illegal stations on the air in the island nation just off mainland China that has only 174 licensed stations. Profits of the pirate stations are said to be so great that operators can afford to pay the fine, roughly \$1,900 (U.S.), and stay on the air.

FCC Cites Rare AM Pirate

A Boston area man was issued an NOUO by the FCC January 7, for illegally broadcasting on 1580 kHz. The man was apparently operating the station out of his place of business with a signal FCC agents measured at 350,000 microvolts/meter at 46 meters. The maximum allowable signal for a Part 15 (unlicensed transmitter) is 15.19 microvolts/meter at 30 meters. Legitimate Part 15 operators using FCC approved FM transmitters have an output of 100 mW and an effective service range of about 200 feet (61 meters). The NOUO is a warning to



C. Crane's FM transmitter, a true Part 15, FCC certified, 100mW FM transmitter. (Courtesy: C. Crane)

close illegal broadcast operations or face a fine and/or imprisonment.

Three Bronx FM Pirates Nabbed

In the pirate broadcast industry there has to be a certain cachet in being the year's first FM pirate to be busted by the FCC. According to FCC documents, for 2010 that honor goes to an operator out of Bronx, New York, who received an NOUO for operating on 91.3 FM with an output measured at 7,280 microvolts/meter at 639 meters. One other Bronx operator was similarly busted for operations on 107.3 FM and a third was issued a Notice of Apparent Liability of Forfeiture (NAL) for an early NOUO and also operating on 107.3 FM. The fine was set at \$10,000. Two Brooklyn residents were jointly hit with a separate \$10,000 NAL. In the first eight days of January, the last official filing before this issue went to press, seven FM pirates were busted by FCC agents.

AM/FM/TV BROADCASTING

FCC Stalled on OTA Giveaway

Last month in this column it was reported that the FCC, egged on by wireless broadband interests, was considering taking spectrum space away from Over-the-Air (OTA) TV and delivering it to those broadband interests for commercial exploitation. The ever-hungry broadband lobby claims it will need 800 MHz worth of space and, since all of broadcast TV occupies only 300 MHz, taking over OTA will be just the beginning. But a coalition of some 226 TV stations, according to an article on *Television Broadcast.com*, has filed a response asking the FCC to study the issue more closely. The FCC had been given a deadline to devise a coherent national broadband plan by February 17, but has since asked for a one month extension on that deadline.

LG Introduces Mobile DTV Receiver

After 3D movie technology, portable digital TV reception was all the rage at January's Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the annual geek-fest where public relations people run wild and production specialists run behind them explaining why the products promoted by the PR people are delayed to market. Still, LG Electronics' small DTV receiver is likely to be a product you'll end up buying before the year is out, especially if you live in a Gulf coast state prone to hurricane excitement. With the shift to digital TV last year, reception of DTV signals on portable TV sets was difficult and the old method of listening to the analog audio on a TV audio portable radio disappeared forever. LG's larger DP570MH portable DTV with integrated DVD player (pictured) will cost \$249.



LG Electronics portable and mobile digital TV receiver. (Courtesy: LG Electronics)

PUBLIC SERVICE

FL Scanner Listeners Being Shut Out

A report in *Florida Today* looked at current moves statewide by public service agencies to shut out legitimate scanner listeners so that criminals, who might use scanners, won't be able to follow police activity. The article noted that at issue are American citizens' rights to monitor the goings on of their taxpayer-funded public servants using their taxpayer-owned airwaves in pursuit of protecting the lives and property of those same taxpayers. Meanwhile, police agencies would like to keep much of what they do under wraps for fear that criminals may take advantage of something they hear over a scanner. The article pointed out that it is illegal, and has been for some time, for Florida residents without an amateur radio license, to have a scanner mounted in a vehicle. The article also quoted the Palm Bay police chief as doubting that there would be wholesale encryption of scanner frequencies. He noted that there's a great value in the public's knowledge about accidents or natural disasters such as hurricanes.

FCC: No More 700 MHz Wireless Mics

In an effort to clear the vacated 700 MHz band for eventual use by public safety entities, the FCC has banned the use of wireless FM microphones in that band as of June 12, 2010. Details on the move may be found at www.fcc.gov/cgb/wirelessmicrophones. One company, Shure, which had been selling such products, has been offering rebates in a program that ends June 30, 2010. Details on that program may be found at www.shure.com/700.

Cell Phone Dummies on Parade

So many stories are received every month at the *Communications* desk regarding inept criminals, who are forever leaving their cell phones at the scene of the crime, that one regular contributor sends these reports under the subject heading *cell phone dummies*. Here are just two cases in point:

Recently, Ohio police were able to use the built-in GPS system in a stolen phone to track the criminal who stole the phone. According to a report in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, police have been using cell phone technology to trace the location of a person using a cell phone for more than ten years. But, in those instances, cooperation from the phone service provider has to be secured and the target's phone must be on. Now, with the advent of GPS embedded technology, that job just got a whole lot simpler.

In January, an alleged car burglar in Puerto Rico was caught after he inadvertently left his cell phone behind at the scene of a car he was said to have been burgling. The article in the *San Juan Monitor* noted that the culprit was linked to other similar crimes through his cell phone and, when apprehended, he was (oops!) carrying several bags of cocaine in his pockets.

"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, Roy Berger, Bob Grove, Norman Hill, Bob Margolis, and Larry Van Horn.