

Washington Issues for Engineers

Wisconsin Broadcasters Clinic

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The State of the FCC

- Full Commission for the first time since early 2021
- Potential for more controversial actions that have been on hold while there was a 2-2 Democratic – Republican tie
- What could it mean for broadcasters
 - Review of ownership rules in the next 90 days
 - Review of EEO rules
 - Potentially review of some of the paperwork requirements abolished under the last Commission

The State of Washington DC

- Partisan battles all over
- Government funding issues still up in the air – a shutdown if nothing done by November 17?
- Congressional leadership controversy makes resolving issues even more complex
- For broadcasters - If you have FCC authorizations that you need in the next few months, start calling now to get them in place before the end of current funding extension
- If any final budget bill passes, watch for unique provisions that may be hidden in the legislation

Specific Issues to Talk About

- EAS Compliance
- FM Digital Power
- 13 GHz repack
- AM Improvements
- ATSC 3.0
- Zoncasting and C4s
- New station filing windows
- Compliance and enforcement issues
 - Operating in compliance with your license
 - Keeping required paperwork
 - Tower lights
 - Public file
 - Accessibility Issues

EAS Issues

- EAS Test last week
 - EAS Form 2 due October 5
 - EAS Form 3 due November 20
 - Stations should be reviewing performance and fixing anything that went wrong
 - Important for showing that broadcast industry is central to emergency network
- Lots of issues with false EAS tests – required reporting when you become aware of having broadcast false EAS alerts
- December deadline for updates to EAS to default to CAP
- FCC proposals for EAS security – including minimum security standards and annual reporting of security measures

FM Digital Improvements

- Proposal to allow power increases by FM digital stations up to -10 dBc, or 10% of analog power
- Proposal to allow power increases with notice to FCC – amount of power increase based on contour protection to first-adjacent channel stations
 - Questions as to whether any notice to adjacent channel stations should be permitted, and whether real-world interference should be considered
- Also, proposal to allow asymmetrical sideband operations if power increase on one sideband is limited
- Comment period ended last week – ripe for FCC consideration

Another Spectrum Grab

- 13 GHz used for STLs and ENG
- FCC looking to repurpose some of the spectrum like they recently did with C Band
- Existing users must take action by **November 29** to ensure protections if new uses are approved
 - Must certify that your use of spectrum is as set out in your authorization
 - If it is not, must make corrections by that date
 - Any planned changes must also be made by that date
- Freeze on significant change for facilities in the band

AM Radio Issues

- AM in cars is the big issue – to be discussed in next session
 - Not an FCC issue, bill in Congress that National Highway Traffic Safety Administration would enforce
- Still pending proposals for more fundamental issues to change interference protections
 - Proposals for less protection for clear channel stations, and for other high-powered stations – NPRM on clear channels issued more than 5 years ago
 - Proposal to allow more interference on fringe of coverage, but other stations would have opportunities to increase power in core areas
 - Controversial in the industry – no consensus so no action
 - Ideas pop up from time to time for full-time use of translator with silent or surrendered AM – consistently rejected so far
 - Questions as to how ownership changes might affect AM

ATSC 3.0

- Voluntary system – need a partner to convert as some station needs to provide ATSC 1 service for the foreseeable future – requirement will stay in place at least through July 2027
- Current transmission system in place for same period
- Issues still being resolved on what conversion will mean for your station
 - Could be used for localized services
 - More interactive applications as it is IP-based system
 - Could be used for data applications
 - More mobile applications
 - Even audio in play
- Issues on patents, receiver availability, roll out of specialized programming and other applications
- NAB-FCC Working groups including broad cross-section of interested parties on how to promote roll-out – reports due by next June

Other Pending FM Proposals

- GeoBroadcast Solutions zonecasting proposal pending and ready for FCC action
 - Supporters suggest new advertising opportunities for broadcasters – and local news through boosters originating limited programming
 - Opponents worried about interference and change in “localism” as it would allow big stations to compete in outlying smaller markets
- Proposal for C4 FMs
 - Midway between Class A at 6 kw and C3 at 25 kw
 - Proponents think it will provide for better building penetration and more consistent signal
 - Opponents worry about more interference, including to translators
 - So far, just a Notice of Inquiry – need an Notice of Proposed Rulemaking before anything else happens

Filing Windows

- LPFM window in early November
 - Opportunities for nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies
 - Possible concerns for FMs – second adjacent channel waivers
- TV stations have been filing for improvements and channel changes as TV freeze lifted two years ago
- LPTV stations looking for same opportunities – probably in near future
- Translator and new FM windows probably up next – not until at least 2024

Lots of Enforcement Issues to Watch

- STAs when not operating, or not operating as your license says
- Lots of translator and auxiliary issues
 - Make sure stations are where they are supposed to be
 - And operating at the right power with the right antenna
 - Update auxiliaries as facilities change
- Silent stations being penalized – lose license after a year – if you are operating from unauthorized location, may count as if you were off the air
- Tower lights must be monitored – and issues reported to FAA– check painting too, and make sure tower registration is accurate
- Online public file very important
- Remember to keep station log – and appoint Chief Operator in writing who reviews and signs log weekly

More Issues

- TV captioning issues
 - Accuracy
 - Online captioning too
- Emergency information that conveyed visually during non-news programs must be aurally conveyed on SAP channel
- CALM Act concerns
- Video description expanding to Top 100 markets on January 1 – proposal to expand by 10 markets each year until all markets are covered

FCC and the Broadcast Engineer

- Plenty of issues to worry about
- Few if any random inspections anymore – but still plenty of penalties
- Compliance important too for sales, financings, and other station life-cycle events – so don't skimp just because FCC not routinely knocking at your door
- Still inspections on complaints – tower lighting issues real important not just for FCC, but for liability purposes too
- ABIP still important to stay in compliance
- Compliance is everyone's job

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