



COMMUNICATIONS

by Ken Reitz

"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, Ralph Johnson, and Larry Van Horn

SHORTWAVE/AMATEUR RADIO

Tale of Two Ham Antenna Companies

Last month signaled the end of the road for GLA Systems, maker of the Texas BugCatcher mobile ham antenna. In a statement posted on his website, owner Henry Allen K5BUG said, "It's been a fun 30 years, but it is time to hang it up. I would like to thank everyone who has made this experience possible...it has been a great trip down a long road."

The posting gave a timetable for the company's final months: "All orders received before October 31, 2009 will be filled. Effective November 1, 2009, only orders for items that are in stock at the time will be accepted. Effective December 31, 2009, the toll free line 800-588-2841, will be discontinued."

Meanwhile, long-time amateur radio antenna manufacturer Cushcraft was purchased July 31, 2009 by MFJ Enterprises, Inc. of Starkville, Mississippi. A statement released by the new owner, Martin F. Jue, president and founder of MFJ, stated that, "We are excited to have the Cushcraft amateur radio antennas product line alongside our other five companies."

MFJ had previously bought Hy-gain antennas in 2000 and produces a line of MJF-branded antennas as well. Cushcraft's line of 50 antenna products, ranging from HF through UHF and including verticals as well as horizontal beams, will be added to the MFJ catalog. Mr. Jue stated that Cushcraft models would continue to be made in Manchester, New Hampshire.

FCC Grants Experimental Licenses

The FCC was busy back in September issuing experimental licenses for various operations, including the Boeing Company, "for testing the radiated field effects of PEDs [Personal Electronic Devices] on aircraft electronic components and systems...and a ground cellular system on board commercial aircraft." Lockheed Martin received an experimental license "for identifying and geo-locating low power and high ground based signals."

While you may not have heard of L-3 Communications, the company is on the Fortune 500 list and receives a lot of money from the Pentagon for various high-tech, missile-related programs. The company received the call sign WE3XYO to operate in 902-928 MHz to test and evaluate command and control of an unmanned aerial vehicle.

Powerwave Technologies, Inc. received a license to operate in 2541.5-2561.5 MHz and 2630.5-2650.5 MHz for "testing WiMax mobile user handover and coverage operability in a network configuration."

And, the University of Puerto Rico at

Mayaguez received a number of licenses at 9.410 GHz for testing lower-tropospheric weather radar to study rainfall.

AM/FM/TV BROADCASTING

KHCM-AM Goes CRI

An article in the Honolulu *Star-Bulletin* from September 4, explained the story of two seemingly strange bed-fellows: local AM station, KHCM 880 kHz (owned by Christian broadcasting conglomerate Salem Communications) and China Radio International (CRI), a radio service controlled by the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China. The agreement brings CRI's full schedule of programs in Chinese, English, Korean and Japanese to the 24/7 station, operating under an agreement between Salem and California-based R & C Productions.



Paradise and CRI Too: KHCM-AM 880 Switches to China Radio International for programming. (Courtesy: KHCM-AM)

The article quoted CRI officials, at a gathering to promote the programming change, as saying that China does not prevent listeners in China from hearing VOA and BBC shortwave broadcasts; and a senior company official from Salem described CRI broadcasts as "not intensely political." It turns out that the whole deal is simply a commercial venture; CRI is merely buying all of KHCM-AM's broadcast time. Meanwhile, sister station KHCM-FM continues its flag-waving, all-American, all-country format under the red, white and blue "Country 97.5" logo.

Pirate Cat Radio Gets City Approval

It's hard to imagine a city where the local pirate radio station is not only taken for granted by local citizens, but publicly praised by city officials. But then, San Francisco is not an ordinary city. The San Francisco *Chronicle*, in its on-line site www.sfgate.com, reports that a member of the local board of supervisors dropped by the radio station/coffee house a couple of months ago to present the station with a certificate of



Pirate Cat Radio gets approval from San Francisco officials, but will the FCC pet the nice kitty? (Courtesy: Pirate Cat Radio)

commendation, on behalf of the whole board, for, among other things, "[Pirate Cat Radio's] trailblazing efforts toward freeing the airwaves from corporate control, providing the community with training in radio broadcasting skills, [and] empowering voices ignored by traditional media outlets..."

Cal. TV Station Can Air 20 Channels

A report on [TV Technology.com](http://TVTechnology.com) from early September details how a low-powered community TV station in San Jose, California, KAXT-CA, is using available technology to allow it to broadcast up to twenty MPEG2 video and audio channels within its allotted 19.39 Mbps signal. The commercial-supported station's main intent is to provide more alternative programming, including multicultural content, expected by the area's diversified population, within the station's limited budget. The station believes the concept can be a business model for similar low-power TV stations nationwide.

The station currently programs 12 video channels and 4 audio channels including Cool Music Network (world music videos), Que Dong (Vietnamese), Tempos Finales (Spanish Christian), Bahia TV (Brazilian Portuguese), Colours TV (multi-cultural), i2TV (Internet to TV), Jewelry TV (jewelry shopping), Peanut TV (pet care), Coastal TV (California coastal tourism channel), and Corner Store TV (shopping).

Eco-Terrorists Blamed in Downed Towers

Many media outlets reported the toppling of two of four radio towers belonging to KRKO-AM in Snohomish, Washington in early September. Most articles, including those written by the Associated Press, blamed "eco-terrorists," specifically, a group calling itself Earth Liberation Front (ELF) for the act. And, why not? A large banner left at the site indicated ELF was behind the attack.

But, the *Seattle Times*' staff reporter Sara Jean Green, dug a little deeper. Even though a web site, purporting to speak for the ELF claimed responsibility for the attack, the *Times* quoted the general manager of the family-owned, sports-format radio station as being in doubt. He said he suspected "disgruntled locals" who had just recently lost a court case against the station's tower site which is located on farm land.

The manager told the *Times* that the family will replace the towers and "accelerate plans to add several more." The towers had been brought down with the aid of a large piece of earth-moving machinery that had been left at the site, apparently part of the new construction plans.

According to the *Times* article, there were plenty of local people annoyed with the installation and the fact that the family had just received permission from the FCC to construct a second 50kW AM station at the site. Residents, according to the article, had been complaining of all manner of RF interference they blamed on the station including sportscasts coming in on a local church's PA system and electric garage and car doors randomly opening.

BusRadio? What Next!

Because school buses are already a terrible place to be stuck for 30 or 50 minutes twice a day for everyone involved, why not make it even worse by piping kid-oriented programming over the buses' loudspeaker systems? That's been the trial run for a company calling itself BusRadio which features not just pop music, commercials, public service announcements and games, but offers prizes and cash to students for texting answers to quizzes. Another fun feature is texting a "shout-out" to your bus driver, girlfriend or secret heartthrob. It makes riding the bus just like a fun-filled TV sitcom.



BusRadio: Games, Prizes, Music...It's like being at home with 80 of your closest friends and enemies. (Courtesy: BusRadio)

Now, with all the data in (including a little-publicized public comment period from the FCC, a raft of scornful comments from a Harvard-based organization called Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, and high praise from various bus drivers who might rather lash the little darlings to their seats) the FCC is weighing the chance for the "service" to go nationwide. Since BusRadio is the only company with such a plan, it hopes to enjoy a monopoly on taxpayer-funded school transportation. So, what's next? BusTV, of course!

SATELLITES

Chinese Space Debris Haunts ISS

Remember that non-functioning Chinese weather satellite that they used for target practice in space back in 2007? The International Space Station is routinely haunted by debris from that event and other accidents and ineptitudes while NASA tries to maintain a no-junk zone around the ISS that extends out to 15 miles around it, in addition to a one-half mile zone above and below it. Still, Space.com reports that "...part of a three year-old slab of a European rocket body," was said to have come within one mile of ISS recently.

Cash-strapped City Taxes Dish Viewers

Omaha, Nebraska, like most American municipalities these days is strapped for cash. Falling property values have depleted the tax base, operating costs continue to rise, and budget decisions need to be made. What to do? The



Omaha wants to take a bite out of DISH and DirecTV viewers. (Courtesy: DISH Network and DirecTV)

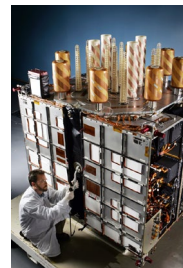
friendly folks at the National Cable Telecommunications Association (NCTA), cable-TV's national lobbying group, had a brilliant idea: tax satellite-TV viewers! One city councilman is fronting the scheme that proposes a \$50/year fee that, he estimates, would raise \$2 million in much needed revenue.

The Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association (SBCA), the nation's satellite-TV lobbying group, was not amused. Citing FCC exemption from special taxes, the SBCA warned the city council that they would fight the tax. Omaha, seeking to slither around the FCC's exemption, is calling the tax a "safety inspection fee." Stay tuned for the showdown in Omaha.

The NCTA apparently went door-to-door to states and municipalities trying to drum up taxes for satellite-TV viewers. They were in Sacramento, California, in early September, asking state legislators to tax the state's estimated 3.6 million satellite-TV customers, citing the mouth-watering figure of \$170 million that could flow into the state's empty treasury. But, the scheme ran out of time when it failed to get on the legislative calendar within the legal time limit.

New GPS Sat Goes Live

Lockheed Martin announced September 3, the operational status of the last in a series of eight modernized GPS satellites for global military and civilian use. Dubbed GPS IIR-21 (M), the satellite was launched by the Air Force August, 17. According to a press release by the company, the program is on track to launch the first GPS IIIA satellite in 2014. It must be time to finally bury the hysteria generated a few months back about the nation's GPS constellation going down.



Lockheed Martin GPS IIRM (Courtesy: Lockheed Martin Corp.)

San Antonio Scanner Channels Restored

The city of San Antonio, Texas, hatched a plan to bar the media from listening in to dispatches from the fire department and Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Reason given was so that the city could comply with provisions in the Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. The theory was that the identity of individual patients would be compromised through in-the-clear transmissions.

But, according to an editorial in the *San Antonio Express-News*, the city found a way to keep the dispatch channels open to the press while keeping patient information private through the use of channels that are blocked to public reception. The paper had expressed a fear that closing all dispatch channels to the press would have "made it seem as though the city was trying to avoid scrutiny of its emergency services, scrutiny that in recent years has resulted in controversy and a review of EMS protocol."

Scientific American Examines Interoperability

The September issue of *Scientific American*, available on line at www.scientificamerican.com, examined the difficulties of developing a nationwide system of radios for first responders. The article noted that even though it's been eight years since 9/11, there are few local systems capable of allowing police and fire/rescue services to talk with one another, let alone any such nationwide system in place. The excellent article spells out the problem of having only one company so far, with a design that meets the criteria for such a system as set by the Department of Homeland Security.

It further examined the slow pace of the transfer of the former analog TV band to be developed as the place for such communications and the fact that commercial ventures bidding for the space wanted to be granted priority over public service agencies, even during an emergency, for its use.

7,432 Cell-phone Drivers Ticketed in NYC

The *Washington Post* noted that one day this past summer New York City police staged a 24 hour crackdown on violators of the city's law against driving and using a cell phone that is not a hands-free device. While on an average day the NYPD issues 580 such tickets, during this particular day they wrote 7,432 tickets which, at \$130 a pop, brought the city nearly \$1 million in revenue. Omaha and California, take note!

Bug-Killer Radio

Finally, *Radio World* on-line reported August 12 that KroneHit Radio, in Vienna, Austria was transmitting more than the usual radio fare this past summer. The station is said to have imbedded a 14.850 Hz tone (the 27th harmonic of a mosquitoes buzz), intending to imitate the buzz of a female mosquito, in its audio signal aimed at driving away all mosquitoes within a 5 meter radius of the radio. The station apparently warned that the effect does not work if the listener is wearing headphones.