

## FCC: We Did Not Have Relations With The BPL Industry

In the beginning there were lies. Industry lies about BPL (Broadband Over Powerline), that there is *no* harmful interference caused by BPL. Then came bigger lies and wordsmithing with assurances that *if* there *was* interference caused by BPL it would be worked out before wide-scale implementation.

You don't have to be a super-grade employee at the Federal Communications Commission to instantly realize the proverbial cart was positioned before the horse. (I suppose at least that way the Commission doesn't have to face the stink). Why is it, though, that what seems too simple and like common sense to average folks takes the bureaucracy a team of investigators, politicians, and lawyers to figure out? It seems only logical that, even *before* localized deployment of BPL, the industry would do the smart and proper thing and check for interference first. Apparently they don't think like average people, the very people who will bear the brunt of BPL's interference: the workers at FEMA who have expressed concerns about the interference potential and hams (not just those engaging in hobby talk on the radio, but those working in emergency situations where many times the incoming signal is very weak and already badly beaten by manmade interference from computer monitors, security devices, electric motors, and, yes, overhead powerlines).

Then came *more* lies and deception when the industry itself claimed ignorance of the interference issue—perhaps by doing so they were saying more than they intended, even after technically proficient hams with radios and measurement tools from the ARRL showed them beyond *any doubt* the *tremendous* interference caused by BPL in such locations as Manassas, Virginia, and Westchester County, New York.

As if the blatant disregard for professional analysis and the facts weren't bad enough, the FCC stepped in and embraced BPL, as if saying "Scooch on over here, we think you need some bureaucratic lovin'." I'm referring here to Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy's inexcusable comments on BPL: "I am very excited about broadband over powerline technology... and believe it has a very bright future." She went on, "...continuing development of BPL technology is a major step forward." A while later, only after more ink and dis-

cussion in the radio community about her comments than that over Janet Jackson's Super Bowl stunt, her words were Washingtoneed into a rather tepid recant.

She also said, "When the Commission completes this rulemaking I expect that we will eliminate many existing rules and substantially modify others; the central question is the degree of regulation that will remain during the transition to a more robustly competitive market."

In January's "Tuning In" I suggested that what she meant to say was, "We're going to rewrite Part 15 so BPL is a shoe-in. This is a big bucks opportunity and our mind is made up. The Notice of Inquiry is merely a requirement." And so it goes, sometimes predicting the future is easier than you think.

To me there's nothing worse than a politician—and Abernathy is certainly one—backpedaling after a deliberate remark before industry representatives. They think they're so cunning and clever in tossing out a comment here and there for public consumption, but in reality their antics just prove to thinking Americans that they and the D.C. money grabbers really don't care what you and I think. Need evidence? There's more, much more.

When was the last time the FCC ever amended Part 15 rules to accommodate anyone? Well, as this is being written, the FCC has released a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) on BPL systems. I tried to find a historical precedent where the Commission proposed amendments to Part 15 rules to accommodate another service, but couldn't find any. What they're proposing is to provide measurement guidelines for the BPL devices and system. Given the apparent intimate relationship between the Commission and the BPL industry, it seems like that should have been considered a couple of years ago—in an early planning stage. Would you go on a few dates, finally meet the parents and family pets, and *then* have the stupidity to tell your future spouse's father you'll be glad to marry him or her if only he'd pay for a facelift first? One can't help but wonder why, if the interference issue isn't a major concern, that the Commission, as stated in the NPRM, would require BPL providers to incorporate "...adaptive interference-mitigation techniques" in the first place. Strange, isn't it?

The ARRL's latest electronic newsletter talks about BPL and the FCC's NPRM as follows: "The NPRM goes on to point out that because BPL has the capability to stay clear of specific frequencies, BPL providers can simply "avoid the use of amateur frequencies when in close proximity to amateur outdoor antennas." "

Unless the technical specs have changed in the past two days, the last we knew was that BPL would operate on HF all the way up to near 80 MHz. How do they propose to "avoid the use of amateur frequencies..." when we're talking about deployment basically covering the entire HF spectrum all the way to the hams' 6-meter band? And this bit about "close proximity to amateur outdoor antennas" is a crock. I know a lot of hams and SWLs that have apartment or condo antennas that aren't readily visible, and plenty of others—myself included—who don't have a mega-acre antenna farm, but use a couple of long wires or a simple vertical antenna. Seems once again the FCC's thinking cap is in the closet.

Did you know that under the proposed rules, the burden of initiating corrective action in interference cases is on the shoulders of the *licensed* services? One assumes that includes our already over-worked public safety professionals—as if they have the time and resources to do what the bureaucracy and industry should do before implementation of BPL—AND without massaging the Part 15 rules to accommodate the powerline industry.

Let's not forget about the Citizen's Band users of the spectrum, who also must be able to *hear* a signal in order to respond to it in an emergency. CB is real, it's here to stay and not all operators are renegades. Remember Hurricane Andrew? CB played a vital role there and will in the future—if operators are able to hear each other. Point is CB, FRS, MURS, and other services are entitled the *same* interference protection from Part 15 devices as are individually licensed services.

The Commission noted in the NPRM, "...that power line noise already presents a significant problem for hams... we therefore would expect that, in practice, many amateurs already orient their antennas to minimize the reception of emissions from nearby electric power lines."

It's a good point on paper, at least. Fact is, I know *many* hams and SWLs that have

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all but given up on the hobby because of noise traced directly to powerlines. And, no, they're not all in urban areas. Newsflash for the FCC: Most folks can't just "orient their antennas" when a new noise problem arises—hence all the books and articles about tracking down interference and *eliminating it at the source*, if possible.

Since the FCC is doing the industry's bidding, I thought it appropriate to see what they say about interference. There, on the FCC's own official website at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/interference.html>, is a Consumer Fact Sheet that says,

A simple method of determining the location of electrical interference is by using a portable AM radio tuned to a quiet frequency at the lower end of the dial. If you hear static or a buzzing sound, check to see if it corresponds with the interference to your equipment. The closer you get to the source of the interference, the more intense the static will be. If you cannot locate the interference source in your own house, check with your neighbors to see if they also receive interference. The house that has the worst interference will most likely be the source of the interference. If you can determine that the electrical interference is not caused by any device in your home or a neighbor's home served by the same transformer, contact the customer service department of your local power company. Most power companies will investigate the problem and take steps to correct it.

I think I'll read that again. Okay, so just what *is* the FCC saying? Once again, we've got to do their work for them, but at least we've got the sense to put the horse in the right place.

And what about those *emergency* situations that can and will happen when we least expect them. Should emergency responders simply "orient their antennas" to work around BPL noise? Hardly.

That's what this battle is all about in the final analysis: eliminating the interference at the source. But in this case it's like tracking the noise source to the whoopee cushion on the Chairman's leather chair. Who among us will walk in and pull his plug to put *us* out of our misery, especially if you've got to alternately crawl and tiptoe through a maze of discarded BPL interference reports from the ARRL?

This whole BPL mess and careless attitude of the power industry reminds me of the drivers who take their sweet time moving to the side of the road as the ambulance with flashing lights and screaming siren bears down on their tail. No problem. It doesn't affect them unless the ambulance is racing to help their son or daughter a mile down the road. Then the emergency suddenly becomes very personal.

No problem for BPL proponents either—*unless* the interference caused by their own hand prevents that ambulance crew from ever hearing the dispatcher in the first place. Don't you think it's high time for the FCC and industry to climb out of bed and stop putting the Almighty Dollar ahead of our public safety? It's time to pull plug on business as usual.

You have until June 1 to file a "reply comment" with the FCC. Go to <http://gull.foss2.fcc.gov/ecfs/Upload> where you'll find BPL Docket 04-37 at the top of the page. ■

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