

2015 APR 20 P 2:32

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MEMORANDUM

APR 20 2015

TO: Peter H. Doyle, Chief, Audio Division
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

FCC Mail Room

FROM: John Sakowicz, Board Member, 2013-2016
Mendocino County Public Broadcasting (KZYX/Z)
Board Treasurer, 2014
Volunteer On-Air Programmer, *All About Money*, 2007-2014

RE: My Counter Response to MCPB's response to the Informal Objection on the License Renewal based on the broadcast quality.

DATE: April 5, 2015

Reference Information:

- The station's call sign: **KZYX and KZYZ**
- The station's facility ID number: **41157**
- The license renewal application file number: **BRED20130724AAG**

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THIS MEMORANDUM

1. In my initial formal objection to the renewal of the KZYX/ KZYZ licenses of the Mendocino County Pubic Broadcasting, (MCPB) one element of my complaint was that the station's signal was often down. This included periods of dead air, irritating scratchy signals, and fuzz-outs. These were due to the fact that MCPB's broadcast equipment is Korean War era, old and failing. Station management does minimum maintenance to broadcast equipment. It replaces broken parts with used or rebuilt parts that shortly fail. Station resources are allocated to salaries that incidentally, are not disclosed to the public, instead of being allocated towards infrastructure.

I suspect that in answering my complaint, station management has been less than truthful with the FCC. In this memorandum, I will document the regular and predictable failures of the broadcasts at MCPB. This deception should not be rewarded with the renewal of KZYX/KZYZ licenses at this time.

The documentary evidence that I will be submitting to substantiate these many failures of the broadcasts are admissions made by the stations' own General Manager posted on the station's website. Again, these are the GM's admissions and they are irrefutable. I will add, two of the most recent posts from March 2015,

(noted in the packet,) have been removed by the GM from his blog. This puts the total blog entries at 12.

2. By his own admission, the current General Manager has stated in his blog that:

KZYZ/Z experienced numerous incidents of dead air, scratchy and irritating signals and fuzz outs at least twelve times (12) in the first quarter of 2015 ending March 30. Put another way, the signal either dropped off and/or intermittently dropped off, or the audience heard severe noise distortion. Prior to 2015, the GM made eight (8) blog entries indicating the station was off the air completely, or experiencing noise issues. **(See PDF Documentation of the blog entries ATTACHED from the General Manager's Blog, KZYZ/Z Website/Station Business.)**
<http://kzyx.org/index.php/about-us/station-business/general-managers-blog>

Why is the quality of KZYZ/KZYZ signal important in Mendocino County? A clear and uninterrupted signal is important because Mendocino County is a rural county where only 88,000 people live over 2,300 square miles. A public radio station has historically provided earthquake warnings, tsunami warnings, news on seasonal flooding and road closures, advisements on severe weather and power outages, and Code Red Alerts and Amber Alerts from law enforcement. To discuss one example that made national news on the front page of the New York Times, a fugitive wanted on a murder warrant, Aaron Bassler, eluded law enforcement here in our county for 36 days before he was shot and killed in a fire fight with law enforcement.

It is absolutely crucial the KZYZ/KZYZ signal be strong and clear and uninterrupted. In defending the station to the FCC in his answer to the informal objections to the renewal station licenses, I believe the station's General Manager has been less than truthful with the FCC. Again, I refer you to the twelve admissions that he makes of service interruption in the first quarter of 2015 alone and the eight other blog entries prior. Again, I refer you to the documentary evidence that follows this memorandum.

3. KMUD, KMEC-LP, KNYO-LP, are three public radio stations operating in the Mendocino County area and have remained on the air without service interruption. These stations operate on a budget significantly smaller than KZYZ/KZYZ.

For instance, the KZYZ/KZYZ budget is \$ 550,000 and the KMEC-LP budget is \$ 19, 000 and is an all-volunteer station. KZYZ/KZYZ has as staff of 7-8 people. KMEC has no paid staff. The station General Manager at JMEC-LP and all support comes from volunteers. I would respectfully submit to the FCC that KZYZ/KZYZ is not only deceptive in its application for the renewal of its licenses, but as a general matter, the station is poorly managed and wasteful.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

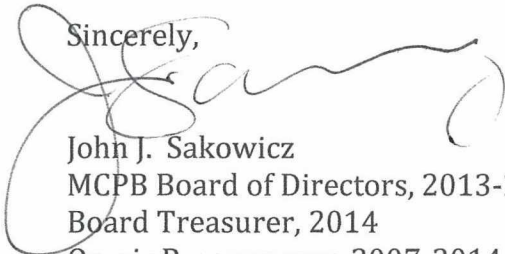
Two licenses have been previously issued to KZYX & KZYZ, Mendocino County Public Broadcasting. The license for KZYX is still pending (2015) **REFERENCE # BRED20130724AAG.**

Currently, KZYX/KZYZ broadcasts from Philo, CA, population 350. Philo is situated in the Anderson Valley. It's mountainous with high trees surrounding the valley-- not unlike rural West Virginia and Appalachia. The result is a chronic loss of signal and poor broadcasting quality. This geographical fact and the antiquated equipment that hasn't been replaced to meet the appropriate standards, contribute to the regular loss of signal and broadcast disturbances.

As a sitting board member of MCPB, I propose, and after careful consideration, I propose that the FCC reassign the KZYX/KZYZ licenses to KMEC-LP and KNYO-LP. I am sure the Corporation for Public Broadcasting will follow the reassignment of these licenses to other stations. Again, I want to reiterate KZYX/KZYZ should never been located in Philo California. Nobody lives in Philo except station management and Philo has a population of 350. Philo is completely surrounded by mountains and high trees on all sides.

Meanwhile, Mendocino County covers 2,300 square miles of rural, mountainous and coastal country. Having a full FCC license on the Coast at KNYO-LP and another full FCC license at KMEC-LP in Ukiah, the county seat of Mendocino County, would seem to make the best sense to me.

Sincerely,




John J. Sakowicz
MCPB Board of Directors, 2013-2016
Board Treasurer, 2014
On-air Programmer, 2007-2014
Recipient of Normal Mailer Institute Fellowship
P O Box 571
Talmage, Ca 95482

cc:


The Honorable Patricia de Stacy Harrison, President and Chief Executive Officer,
Corporation for Public Broadcasting

ALL ATTACHED FILES AVAILABLE AT: [KZYX.ORG\STATION BUSINESS\GENERAL MANAGER'S BLOG](http://KZYX.ORG/STATION_BUSINESS/GENERAL_MANAGER'S_BLOG) UNLESS THEY HAVE BEEN REMOVED BY THE STATION'S GM.

Saturday, March 28th | Last update 12:17:42 PM CPANEL



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90.7 PHILO 91.5 WILLITS AND UKIAH 88.1 FORT BRAGG



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Those Dropouts You Heard Are Fixed - STL Backups Are In Place



Posted by **John Coate** on Monday, 12 January 2015 in **Station Business**

Hits: 617 [Bookmark](#)

STL (Studio Transmitter Link) radios send the signal from Philo up to the main transmitter up on Cold Springs peak. We tend to have fairly chronic issues with these radios, which is why we keep a backup set available when they break. Since it takes two of us to change them over with minimal downtime of the signal, we couldn't change them over the weekend but did change them this morning (Monday) at 9 AM. Now they are in place and working well. We will send the other units to the factory for refurbishing.

It isn't the first time we have had to do this, but good new set of STL radios will cost \$20K. If and when we are in a position to buy them, we will. Meanwhile we have to make do with the ones we have.

As we have said so many times, this is exactly why we have to have backup units all along the chain of the radio signal. The only thing holding that back is having enough money to buy the stuff.

Tags: Untagged

[About the author](#)



John Coate

I am the General Manager of KZYX and the Executive Director of Mendocino County Public Broadcasting. You can contact me directly at gm@kzyx.org See my website cervisa.com for more about me and where I have been.

<http://cervisa.com>

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We Know the Signal is More Scratchy Sounding


Posted by  John Coate on Wednesday, 14 January 2015 in Station Business
 Hits: 801   [Bookmark](#)

We suspect that the problem is with the backup STL units we put into service when the regular ones had so many dropouts. But what we have to ascertain is whether or not the infamous trees that are in the way of the Philo - Cold Springs signal path have now made the whole situation untenable.

We have tried to hold off on this because it will be VERY expensive to remedy this problem and the more stable and better our finances, the less pain this will cause.

Tags: Untagged

 [About the author](#)

 **John Coate**
 I am the General Manager of KZYX and the Executive Director of Mendocino County Public Broadcasting. You can contact me directly at gm@kzyx.org See my website cervisa.com for more about me and where I have been.
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Regarding the Current Audio Problem



Posted by **John Coate** on Tuesday, 27 January 2015 in **Station Business**

Hits: 505



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As we have had to report many times over the years, KZYX/KZYX has chronic problems with its set of STL radios. These Radios send the signal from the studio to the transmitters. Thus: Studio Transmitter Link. They work in matched pairs: two for the Philo-Cold Springs connection ("shot") and two for the Cold Springs - Laughlin shot. Each pair also requires a corresponding set of antennas.

The main STL radios are about ten years old and are matched with the KZYX and KZYX transmitters, which were installed at the same time. It is not new equipment, but it isn't that old either. It is within its normal life span. Still, like all equipment, it can, and sometimes does, break.

Because of this, in 2013 we resurrected an older pair of STL radios to use as a backup - and we have a spare antenna.

About two weeks ago we experience severe repeated dropouts in the Philo-Cold Springs STL shot. Thinking the STL radios themselves were the problem, we took them out of service and installed the backup set. The signal is running on the backups now. *But we know they do not sound as good as they should. We have tried various adjustments which have helped, but we have not yet succeeded in eliminating an irritating scratchiness in the audio. We are still trying to improve it. But it might be the best it can be, given the physical situation of interference from trees.*

We sent the main STL radios to our main radio engineer/repairman for testing. His expertise is in great demand because there is a shortage of radio technicians these days. But he is currently testing them. It just isn't overnight service.

To be honest, we hope the radios are broken in some way. Because if they are not, then it is likely that the problem is the growing trees that have interfered with the Philo-Cold Springs signal at least since 2008. If the trees are now so large that STL radios cannot get past them, then the major re-routing of the KZYX signal that I have described in detail here and other places such as my GM reports, must begin in earnest.

This will be very expensive and disruptive. I have been holding off on it as long as possible so that we are in the most stable financial condition attainable before undertaking this huge project. Our long term debt is now around \$16K. We pay it off by the month. It is not far from being low enough to pay it off in one final payment, but with so many demands on our resources, it is not time to do that yet. Freeing up that hefty monthly payment will make large-scale changes much easier. Also, we will have more confidence after we establish success with a three-per-year pledge drive schedule.

We have collectively come a long way since the dark days of massive debt in 2008-12. A big part of that is our smartly managing risk. So we are walking a careful line of trying to maintain the highest possible signal quality without committing ourselves to a new debt load that we are not yet sure we could easily pay off.

Meanwhile we will keep working on those STLs. We appreciate your patience.

Tags: Untagged



About the author



John Coate

I am the General Manager of KZYX and the Executive Director of Mendocino County Public Broadcasting. You can contact me directly at gm@kzyx.org See my website cervisa.com for more about me and where I have been.

<http://cervisa.com>

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water supplies come the summer.

RadioLab:

Saturday @ 6:00

PM

Questions: What does the world's fastest runners, New York City's poop and quicksand have in common? Nothing! But the next Radiolab asks why a small tribe in Kenyan is home of the world's fastest runners, what happens to New York City's poop after it's pooped, and why kids aren't afraid of quicksand anymore.

eTown; Saturday @

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Music & conversation with Nick & Helen Forrester. This week, Gregory Alan Isakov & Nathaniel Rateliff.

This American Life;

Sunday @ 11:00

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The Signal Is Back On The Air



Posted by John Coate on Thursday, 29 January 2015 in Station Business

Hits: 560



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Our Napa-based engineer configured a loaner unit for us, which got us back on the air at about 3:20 PM today.

Our backup STL transmitter unit, that we put in place because the regular ones were misbehaving, has failed completely. we will send our broken STL in for rebuild.

Tags: Untagged



About the author



John Coate

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Crazy Weather Makes Crazy Electric Problems



Posted by John Coate on Monday, 09 February 2015 in Station Business

Hits: 441



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Seems like every problem one can have electrically has visited us in Philo the past couple of days. Grid power off, generator up and down, fuses blown, UPS systems keeping us on at times and more than one of them gave out too. But - the constant fluctuations made the systems get confused at different times making one or more component go down which knocked us off the air. And then Monday afternoon the Cal Fire generator at Cold Springs went down and we had to go up there and restart it.

Right now we are on the air. We hope to keep it that way.

Tags: Untagged



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The Web Stream Is Down During This Power Outage

Posted by **John Coate** on Monday, 09 February 2015 in **Station Business**

Hits: 428 [Bookmark](#)

We have been running on our generator for most of today and last night. We can't run the streamer right now because the mission-critical radio systems need all the power. Sorry! But even the room where I am typing this has no lights and I am doing it on a laptop running on its battery.

I wish I knew when the power will return but outages are extensive all over the coast and Anderson Valley and we just have to wait our turn.

Tags: Untagged

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UPDATE on 90.7 TRANSMITTER PROBLEMS



Posted by John Coate on Saturday, 21 February 2015 in Station Business

Hits: 471



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4 PM Saturday update:

We ordered a replacement fan system that will arrive at SFO at about 12:30 PM Sunday. We, probably I, will pick it up. We are waiting to hear back from the factory as to the size and weight of the package to determine which vehicle we need to use. The cost is a little more than \$1600.

Rich and I went back up to the transmitter a couple of hours ago to see how the fan was holding up. Our transmitter has two settings: high power and low power. As you might expect, at high power the fan blows at high speed and at low power, at a lower (though still pretty high) speed. This is a big transmitter - as big as an average refrigerator. And the cooling fan is as big as the radiator fan in a large vehicle. The fan motor is a beefy 3-phase 220 volt motor. The electronics involved in switching the speeds back and forth are pretty sophisticated too and they use big-sized capacitors.

When we went back up there we discovered that at low power/low speed, the fan was behaving normally without unusual noises such as we had experienced at 7 AM that shut it down. So we turned the transmitter back to high power and the fan did not go up to high speed. So we think that 1. we did the right thing ordering the new fan system because we can't go back to full power without it and 2. the messed-up fan electronics may have been what caused the fuzzy scratch noise. We are not sure about #2 but we have not heard the bad noise much beyond something comparatively slight since we went to low power/low fan.

So that's where we are right now. Seems pretty stable until we get the new parts. We will then take the old fan system and rebuild it and keep it as a backup because the 91.5 transmitter uses the same system and it will surely blow out too.

11 AM Saturday: The big blower that cools the transmitter failed at 7 AM this morning. A ground wire broke. Rich put that bad wire back together so it is now working but the blower unit itself is not turning true so is likely to fail altogether. That is what we think caused the wire to break in the first place. We located a replacement from the manufacturer. The fastest way we can get it for them to take it to the St. Louis airport where they put it on a plane and we go get it at SFO. it will cost at least \$1600 for this - \$1100 for the part and 500 for shipping. The shipping could be more, we don't yet know. The 500 is a ballpark they gave us. There is a strong chance it will fail before we get the replacement. But this is the best we can do.

Tags: Untagged



About the author



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Use 91.5 If You Can Tune It In

Posted by  **John Coate** on Thursday, 12 February 2015 in **Station Business**

Hits: 502   [Bookmark](#)

There is an intermittent noise problem with the 90.7 transmitter that we are trying to get repaired. Until we do, tune your radio to 91.5. Most parts of the county can receive it.

Tags: Untagged

 [About the author](#)



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90.7 Update Tuesday Feb 24 4 PM



Posted by John Coate on Tuesday, 24 February 2015 in Station Business

Hits: 439



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In addition to possible internal interference from a key component of our 90.7 transmitter called the "exciter," we discovered today that when a specific combination of radios from the State of California come on, they cause loud fuzzy interference with our 90.7 signal (and at times even a smaller amount of fuzz to the 91.5 signal). While Rich was up at the tower, some technicians for the State came up there to work on their radios. It was then that they saw the State radios causing the interference.

The State technicians did a few things on their end to reduce that interference, which made a sizable difference. On our end we are going to install our backup exciter for the 90.7 transmitter so we can refurbish the original unit.

Tags: Untagged



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THE 2015 MCPB BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

It's Board election season at KZYX. Follow this [link](#) to the [Election Page](#). Here are the candidates for this election. *Each name links to the candidate's statement:*

District 5:

[Clay Eubank](#)

[Dennis O'Brien](#)

At-large:

[Ed Keller](#)

[Doug McKenty](#)

District 2:

[Benj Thomas](#)

[Tony Novelli](#) (Tony has withdrawn from the race. He has a new statement explaining.)

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Regarding Those "Fuzzouts"



Posted by John Coate on Monday, 30 March 2015 in Station Business

Hits: 48

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Here is the situation as I understand it.

As you may know, the line-of-sight between the Philo STL and the Cold Springs STL (which sends the signal to the transmitter and then on to 88.1 and 91.7) is not good. The trees have grown too tall and the pole the send antenna is on was never high enough to begin with. This has been true since before I got here.

Because that base STL signal is weaker than it should be, it is more suseptible to something interfering if the conditions of the interference are strong. In this case, the 3 CHP radios, when they all come on in a certain way, create a big and loud interference with the 950 megahertz STL frequency that we use. A few weeks ago we mitigated that interference pretty well by improving the shielding around our STL input cables.

Last week the power supply for the STL units failed. I went up and found other places to plug them in. Friday I went back up and installed a new power supply. While there I did move a couple of those input cables some, but I put them back where they had been. However, their shielding may have been fragile enough that when I put them back the protection was compromised. I have to go back up there either today or tomorrow to solder a power wire that had broken and is now held in place rather delicately. While there I will try to improve the shielding to get it back to the level of protection it had.

But until we solve the line-of-sight problem, we are going to be plagued with this or some other related problems because the base signal is less than half of what it should be. It isn't strong enough o overcome that loud fuzz from the CHP radios.

CPANEL THE 2015 MCPB BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

It's Board election season at KZYX. Follow this [link](#) to the [Election Page](#). Here are the candidates for this election. [Each name links to the candidate's statement.](#)

[District 5:](#)

[Clay Eubank](#)

[Dennis O'Brien](#)

[At-large:](#)

[Ed Keller](#)

[Doug McKenty](#)

[District 2:](#)

[Benj Thomas](#)

[Tony Novelli](#) (Tony has withdrawn from the race. He has a new statement explaining.)

Now Playing:
Women's Voices

Playing Next:
[NPR Morning Edition](#)



Having Trouble?

COMING UP ON KZYX

Wildoak Living; Monday @ 9:00 AM

Johanna "Wildoak" talks with Sherrie Smith-Ferri, Executive Director of the Grace Hudson Museum in Ukiah, about a new exhibit, Ignite! The Art of Sustainability. It features 13 of California's foremost environmental artists connecting with their natural surroundings. They use a variety of traditional as well as unconventional media and draw on art, science, spirituality and social justice. Johanna will also share information about simple, non-toxic spring cleaning and other seasonal sustainable living topics.

Farm & Garden Show; Monday @ 1:00 PM

I do not know how much higher the pole here needs to be in order to regain line-of-sight. My idea right now is to use a drone to hover above the pole and take pictures at various heights to see where line-of-sight is regained. If it is too high and we can't raise the pole then the other solutions require the vastly more complex and expensive re-routing of the signal path so it originates in Ukiah or Willits. I have described that scenario in detail in the past. Ultimately this is the way to go.

But we do not have that kind of money right now nor are we likely to get it very soon. The fact is, we are in decent fiscal shape right now but looking ahead a mere couple of months, we have got to raise more money locally or we are going to not only be unable to afford these improvements, but we will again face cutbacks. Right now is when the CPB is giving us the \$54K less. Our grant payment is due in days. This year it's \$33K. Last year it was more than \$80K.

Tags: Untagged

About the author



John Coate

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<http://cervisa.com>

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Join Valerie Kim with Master Gardener Wendy Roberts. They'll be talking about what to be doing in your garden right now, adapting to climate change and taking your calls and questions to help you have a successful garden this year. Women's Voices; Monday @ 7:00 Tune in for a special program to wind up Women's History Month. Featuring profiles of Mendocino County women including Ruth Weiss, Judi Bari and Susan B Jordan.

Mind Body Health; Tuesday @ 9:00 AM

Dr Richard Miller will interview Johann Hari regarding his recent book Chasing the Scream which reveals the origins of america's war on drugs as being a racially motivated action against people of color with no basis in science.

Special Programming ; Tuesday @ 1:00 PM Ecology Hour; Tuesday @ 7:00 PM

On this 5th Tuesday of the month, we present Climate One on the Ecology Hour. This evening, Weather Whiplash. The frequency of extreme weather events, from hurricanes and floods to wildfires and drought, is on the rise across the country. We know that global warming is causing this weather whiplash, but what can be done about it? With Louise Bedsworth of the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research Kathryn Sullivan with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Hunter Cutting of Climate Nexus

Forthright Radio; Wednesday @ 9:00 AM

Joy LaClaire interviews global activist, political economist, crisis mediator & author of over 20 books on Asia, Laurence Brahm, about his latest book, FUSION

THIS POST HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM COATE'S BLOG FILES. IT REFERS TO THIS PAST WEEK, MARCH 26, 2015

MAJOR EQUIPMENT FAILURE THIS MORNING

Part of our system that sends the signal to the transmitter failed this morning at about 6:40 AM. We are trying to remedy the problem. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Follow this [link](#) to listen to the [audio archive of the Candidates Forum](#) which aired Thursday March 5.


Listen and also read the candidates statements (listed in the column on the right of this page) and mail your ballots so they are received by March 31.

Off the Air Thursday, March 26, 2015- (THIS POST FROM COATE HAS BEEN REMOVED)


THE PROBLEM WAS A POWER SUPPLY

We were off the air for a few hours Thursday morning because a power supply failed up at the 90.7 transmitter. We set up a workaround until we replace the part. Thanks for your understanding.

Saturday, March 28th | Last update 12:17:42 PM CPANEL



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Why 91.5 Went Down Last Saturday



Posted by **John Coate** on Thursday, 16 January 2014 in **Station Business**

Hits: 1011



Bookmark

Sometime early Saturday morning KZYX, 91.5, suddenly went off the air. The problem was large: one of the critical components of the transmitter itself, the "exciter," failed and took the signal down with it.

Fortunately, knowing this was a vulnerable part of the radio chain, we had bought a spare exciter last spring. (We got a killer deal on it at \$1200 instead of the usual \$5K.) It took more configuring than we expected, but we got the backup unit into service the next day with the help of ace radio tech Brian Henry. Brian also took the broken unit to his shop to repair it.

If we had not had that backup unit on hand - and remember, it was a weekend, there is a strong likelihood that we would still be off the air this late in the week (Thursday) because the companies who make the gear don't keep this kind of inventory sitting around. The factory told us it could take a week at least to get us a replacement.

For the past year I have been talking a lot about how we need to shore up our physical infrastructure. There are a lot of aspects to it that I won't go into here, but this event points to one of the main ones - we need redundant systems and backup equipment on hand for when things go down. We use very high grade equipment. But it still wears out over time. It isn't a matter of whether something will fail, it is a matter of when.

So, we have to spend a *lot* of money on the equipment and you might not even notice that we have it. In fact, that is best, because when something fails and you hardly notice, then it did its job.

We have backup units ready to go in some other parts of the radio transmission chain, but in many, if not most, areas we are still vulnerable.

(This is a good place for a reminder that we are going to a three-pledge-drive year starting in late February.)

We should all be thankful to Rich Culbertson for getting on the case as soon as he knew what had happened, and for sticking with it day and night until it was back up and running. Way to go Rich. And thanks too to Katharine Cole who gave us the 4WD pickup Rich used to get up to the transmitter on Laughlin Peak.

Tags: Untagged



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Having Trouble?

COMING UP ON KZYX

Living On Earth:
Saturdays @ 6:00
AM

Evolution and climate science are political minefields for teachers in parts of America's "Bible Belt" where many Fundamentalists hold strict creationist views. But some dedicated educators take up the challenge and defend Darwin and data against biblical literalism. Also – what record low snowfall in America's west might mean for salmon and

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Why the Signal Went Down for 2 Days - the Tech Explanation

Posted by  John Coate on Saturday, 05 April 2014 in Station Business
 Hits: 1145   [Bookmark](#)

What you hear on your radio is sent to our transmitters via a special separate radio signal called an "STL" (which stands for Studio Transmitter Link). This is a system of transmitter/receivers and antennas that go from the Philo studio up to Cold Springs Mountain and then across the county to Laughlin Peak.

In this case, the receiver unit at Cold Springs went down because its power supply failed. We were able to restore the signal using an older set of STL radios that we were luckily already in the process of refurbishing at the time. Our main radio engineer, Brian Henry, had them at his Napa shop where he was preparing them for use with a digital main transmitter (they are older analog units). While we regret that work had not finished in time for them to be already in place in the event of a failure, we were close enough to it that we were only down for two days instead of several more had we not been doing that work. even if we had spent the large sums necessary for new STL units (the good ones cost \$10K each and we have 4 of them), it still would have taken time for them to get ordered, set up and shipped.

Meanwhile, Brian is repairing the broken unit. And, since these STL radios have been in continuous service for about ten years, we will replace the power supply on each of the four STL units. When that work is completed we will have refurbished STL units plus a backup set.

In radio, the only way to maintain uptime when your equipment fails is to have redundancy in every part of the equipment chain you can. Historically, KZYX has never had that. we have it now in some places, but obviously not in all. It is our goal to have full redundancy.

None of this addresses the serious and pressing issue of the growing trees that increasingly block the necessary line-of-sight setup that STL radios require. This is a complex and expensive issue that we must deal with - and soon. But I will leave that for a separate posting.

Tags: Untagged

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We are aware that 91.5 still has a problem

Posted by  **John Coate** on Thursday, 01 May 2014 in [Station Business](#)

Hits: 998 [Bookmark](#)

It could be interference - there are many frequencies on that Laughlin tower, and our engineer suggested this - or it could well be our own equipment. We have been rebuilding, shoring up, and backing up out studio-transmitter-links (STLs) so that they provide a steady, robust signal on all our frequencies. We had a failure a couple of weeks ago. We installed backup units while we rebuilt the originals. We are in the process of installing the rebuilt units and letting the backups be backups, but we can hear over the past couple of days that there is still one or more problems, especially causing a staccato signal on 91.5.

We regret it, deeply. What we are doing is trying to solve it with rebuilt equipment instead of brand new, because brand new costs somewhere between 5-10 times as much. If we can't accomplish it with that approach, we'll buy new stuff. But if we do, there goes our surplus. Then other projects - like the Ukiah Signal Project - go off the front burner. Tradeoffs.

Tags: Untagged

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Signal Problems on 91.5


Posted by  **John Coate** on Wednesday, 14 May 2014 in **Station Business**
 Hits: 1207   [Bookmark](#)

We now believe that the problem lies in the signal that is sent from the Cold Springs tower over to the Laughlin tower. The strength of that signal is not strong enough to overcome whatever is interfering with it. We do see that a lot of antennas have been recently hung right next to our STL antenna at Cold Springs and the could be interfering. And we are going to try to climb up to that antenna and inspect the cable going into it. It is weird that this problem mainly shows up around 4 PM in the afternoon. Something that interferes seems to get turned on right around then. But our own equipment should be able to withstand it. So it is a problem that has not been fixed yet. If we can't solve it with these simple fixes, then we are going to have to hire tower climbers who take signal analyzers up and put them in line to assess it. this is expensive and has to be done while the signal is turned off. We hope it doesn't come to this, but we have to do what it takes to solve it.

Big stations get around this sort of thing by having entire alternate STL sets with separate antennas operating on different licensed frequencies feeding into alternate STL units. the only way to guarantee uptime is to have full redundancy along the entire path of the radio signal chain. KZYX and KZYX has never had that. We know that we need it and we are paying the price for it now. It was a big and long term mistake for this organization to not build this as it went along. We have to correct this and we will correct it. But it will take time and money. There is no other way.

Tags: Untagged

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Main Console Board Failure

 Posted by **John Coate** on Monday, 18 February 2013 in **Station Business**
 Hits: 1539   [Bookmark](#)


Today the main control console on our Philo studio failed at about 12:55 PM, just as the Farm and Garden Show was about to begin. Because Rich was here, he was able to cobble together a working substitute in about five minutes from parts taken from the console in Studio B. We had hoped it was the power supply because that seemed like it might be the problem and it's a much cheaper solution. But that isn't it. Rich will be up late tonight (the station will be off the air after midnight) swapping parts around getting something reliable working, and we'll just have to hope we can identify what isn't working so we can order those parts.

We are very close to replacing the main console board anyway - we have some grant money set aside for it and we're hoping that the Mendocino Community Foundation comes through with another grant we seek for it. But changing the hub of the whole system - which is what the control console really is - isn't something we can do in haste or in a day.

Meanwhile, in case you wonder why we need to make money from pledge drives, here it is.

Tags: Untagged

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Audio Issues with Our Satellite Studios


Posted by  **John Coate** on Tuesday, 26 March 2013 in **Station Business**
 Hits: 1277  Print  Bookmark

Many of our programs originate from our studios in Mendocino and Willits. In the past year we have switched from using dedicated ISDN lines to a pure internet solution. This saves us thousands of dollars per year.

We have not been satisfied with the compromises in audio quality we're currently getting with the "compressed" protocol we use. So we purchased a higher quality protocol to improve the sound quality. But our experiments with it so far have shown that we need to improve the strength of the internet lines that carry the audio signal. We are purchasing more bandwidth and buying new routers in order to optimize things. Hopefully this will do the job. On paper it ought to already be good enough. But clearly it isn't. So meanwhile, we hope that you will tolerate the blips and bumps that accompany the current status quo. If it's any consolation, they make us cringe when we hear them too.

Tags: Untagged

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88.1 and KMUD



Posted by John Coate on Tuesday, 21 August 2012 in Station Business

Hits: 1818



Bookmark

Some of you who listen to KZYX on 88.1 have noticed, as I have when I drive past Navarro Point most weekday mornings, that instead of KZYX blasting away with its new hardware, you get KMUD. Some NPR haters may rejoice at this, but even then you might wonder *what is going on?*

Well, KMUD has hugely upgraded their KMUE signal, and in the process changed it from 88.3 to 88.1. This upgrade was very expensive for them, which is a big reason they are having big financial troubles at the moment (but hey, we know what that's like). But they have established themselves as a real power when it comes to signal strength along the coast. When conditions are right, which they seem to be every morning at least (and maybe all the time at one spot north of Cleone), that signal runs south like a freight train and runs our little translator-based 88.1 signal right off the dial.

So what are we to do? Well, we think we can crank up the power some on our own amplifier on Bald Hill, but past that not much we can do other than finding a new frequency on the dial. Sux, but there it is. Transmitters (KMUE at 88.1) running at their legal power have precedence over translators (us at 88.1), and there is no recourse but to petition the FCC to approve us moving. We have already done that once - we used to be at 88.3 you may recall. Indeed we have old T shirts and such that say so.

So, we're working on the problem, seeing if we can legally crank up the power. to make it work better. Meanwhile, 90.7 and 91.5 have excellent reach in Fort Bragg and north provided you have a good radio with a good and well-placed antenna. When I am in my Jeep I get all three signals very well in FB and in quite a lot of the environs.

Tags: Untagged



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