



August 2008

Updates on the News

The Commissioners are coming! The Commissioners are coming! – Vacuum the red carpet, gas up the welcome wagon, get a couple of keys to the city copied up and notify the media. The FCC has announced that, between now and February 17, 2009, the Commissioners themselves are hitting the road, “fan[ning] out” across the country to “raise awareness and educate consumers” about the coming DTV transition. Each stop will feature a “public event”, such as a town hall meeting, workshop or roundtable with a Commissioner, who will (the FCC assures us) also “be available to local press”. No word yet on whether there will also be a moon bounce or maybe pony rides.

A phalanx of FCC staffers will precede by a couple of days the arrival of a Commissioner in each town. The staffers will provide technical and outreach assistance to broadcasters, local officials and others interested in a smooth transition.

Targeted markets include all markets in which more than 100,000 households or at least 15% of the households rely solely on over-the-air signals. The Commission has released a list of 81 markets that will be visited between now and February. Dates for 23 of the visits have been released. Perhaps not surprisingly, the trip to Phoenix is scheduled for the end of December. Details of the visits will be released by the FCC later, although we already know that Commissioner McDowell will be in Anchorage on August 27 and Fairbanks the next day.

Meanwhile, the Commission has announced that the Wilmington, NC DTV test will commence on September 8 at noon, at which point the local commercial network affiliates and the local Trinity Broadcasting low-power station will broadcast their standard programming on digital channels only. BUT the Commission has carved out an exception that will permit the participating stations to broadcast emergency information in analog should the need arise – for example, if a hurricane should threaten the area. (Note that, when the transition does finally arrive in February, 2009, stations will not be permitted to broadcast anything – emergency or not – on their analog channels.) In addition, during the Wilmington test period the participating stations will be broadcasting, in analog, a message advising viewers of the test and alerting them that, if they are seeing the message, they need to upgrade to digital.

And one more thing – the Commission has established a Speakers Bureau which will arrange DTV-related presentations, free of charge, to any group anywhere in the country

requesting one. Just go to www.fcc.gov and click on the “Request A Speaker” button. If you’re looking for speakers, the folks at the NAB can also set you up.

More bad stuff is coming! – In case you may have momentarily lost sight of the dire straits in which we all might find ourselves in the blink of an eye, the FCC is reminding us of just that. It is hosting a “Summit on Pandemic Preparedness: *Enhancing Communications Response for Health Care and First Responders*”. They’ll be looking at such cheery subjects as “telehealth services” and “social distancing/quarantine”, all with an eye to insure that, when the fan gets hit, the necessary communications facilities will be ready to handle the job. The get-together is currently scheduled for September 18 in the Commission’s office in Washington. The original date was announced as September 16 – we’re guessing that the FCC decided that it wouldn’t be ready by then . . .

Togging up for those roadside remotes – We were surprised to learn recently of the “Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)” (no kidding – that’s the name that a majority of your elected Federal representatives signed off on), which was enacted three years ago. Pursuant to SAFETEA-LU, in 2006 the Federal Highway Administration adopted rules which are set to take effect this November (November 24, 2008, to be precise). The rules require that any worker who happens to be working in the public right-of-way of a Federal-aid highway ***must*** wear “high visibility clothing”. This includes newspeople. We’ll be looking into the nitty-gritty of this requirement for next month’s issue, but you might want to focus on this sooner rather than later, in case you’re about to go shopping to freshen up your outerwear wardrobe for the Fall.