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June 12 Comes, Goes

Sun continues to rise in East, dogs still not living with cats

*Lee G. Petro
petro@fhhlaw.com
703-812-0453*

The fat lady has sung . . . the i's have been dotted, the t's crossed . . . the cookie has crumbled . . . the water has passed under the bridge, or maybe it went over the dam. Pick your own metaphor, but the underlying fact remains: Preceded by mournful bureaucratic and political keening that crescendoed to a mega-decibel, panic-inducing banshee wail, the DTV Transition arrived and then was gone, a non-event every bit as anticlimactic as Y2K.

To be sure, call centers, help desks and other resources set up by the Commission, NTIA and broadcasters fielded a surge of inquiries, but a substantial chunk of those calls related to installing and adjusting converter boxes – not a particularly dire threat to the nation's health and safety.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of broadcasters, consumer advocates and the staff at the FCC and NTIA, anyone who did have any DTV-related concerns had a wide range of help available to get them through the transition. According to FCC and NTIA officials, the free on-site installation assistance program was successful, and there were adequate numbers of converter boxes on hand to resolve localized shortage issues.

The Transition did produce a few surprises. The VHF drop-off, for example, particularly in urban areas. Some stations which opted to transition, on June 12, to their VHF channels for digital operation got a rude awakening when calls reporting signal loss started to pour in. That phenomenon had not been predicted when the Commission adopted the new DTV Table. The FCC has sent its staffs to markets (including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago) where that has occurred, to investigate the nature and extent of the signal losses, and to determine whether power increases by the respective stations would solve the problem. One Philadelphia station has already filed for a power increase. The Commission has indicated that it will continue to monitor the situation and work with the broadcasters and the public to resolve these issues. (With the post-transition DTV Table now in place, one obvious solution would be to allow channel changes for stations adversely affected by the signal loss.)

A number of full-power television stations did not make the transition due to financial, technical, or international coordination issues. Several TV owners are in bankruptcy proceedings and were entitled to extensions of the construction deadline. Others encountered equipment glitches when they flipped the switch. Any station which, for whatever reason, is still broadcasting analog signals must continue to make the DTV Consumer notifications and must inform the public of the areas that are not receiving the station's DTV signal.

The Commission will now turn its attention to finalizing plans for the transition of LPTV and Class A television stations to digital service, and issues resulting from that transition, along with lifting the remaining freeze on rulemaking proceedings to change the community of license of television stations. In the meantime, we will keep you informed of any new developments resulting from the DTV Transition.