



The

# **Broadcasters' Desktop Resource**

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

## **Broadcast Operations**

### **AM Broadcasters – Know your Tower Lease Rights!**



**by Dave Dybas**

*[May 2022] Do you own the site where your tower sits? Ownership brings any number of requirements and responsibilities. So, is renting the right answer? Dave Dybas runs down some key points.*

Selling off your AM broadcast towers and leasing them back is not necessarily a bad thing.

It can help financially strapped radio station owners by freeing up some revenue for operations. But, like everything these days, you need to know some of the finer details of leasing to make this arrangement work well.

The responsibility of the tower lease company needs to be spelled out very well in the Lease Agreement – if you want a peaceful deal.

#### **MAKE SURE OF THE LEGAL ASPECTS**

As a former employee of one of the larger tower leasing companies, I know that they have a very sharp team of lawyers drawing up their leases.

Without doubt, Broadcasters need to have their leases reviewed by an attorney that understands broadcasting well before signing them.

It is very important if you enter this process to make sure you understand who is responsible for each item of your maintenance needs as outlined in the Lease.

#### **COMMON AREA MAINTENANCE**

Common Area Maintenance (CAM) is something from which everyone on the leased tower will benefit.

In general, these are services that the broadcaster no longer needs to cover themselves.

They include things like installing and maintaining gravel roads, grounds maintenance, lighting observation & maintenance, security, etc. If properly framed, the broadcaster saves a lot of the expense and the concern over those services.

At the same time, there definitely are costs involved in CAM and every broadcaster should know how they will be invoiced for their part of this CAM. A surprise invoice is never a welcome thing.

## **ENSURING PROPER PRIORITY**

One thing that most broadcasters on leased towers forget is that in most cases they are "only one of many services" on the tower – as such they may not get what they feel should be priority attention to their specific station.

This means certain things need to be included in the Lease they such as:

### **A) Demand** notification 24 to 48 hours before anyone climbs a hot or skirted tower.

Most Tower Service companies are juggling several jobs simultaneously, and sometimes they send a crew out to a job, forgetting there is a broadcaster on the tower.

While such work on monopole cell sites is not a problem for them, for AM broadcasters it is very troublesome to get an unexpected call from a tower crew. Proper advance notice allows the broadcaster to move commercials and programs away from the time the tower work is being done. This is especially critical if it is necessary to power down while the tower climbers are on the structure.

If your lease covers this, you can refuse to let them on the tower if you do not receive notification within the agreed time prior to their work.

### **B) Demand** Pre- and Post AM Antenna base impedance measurements prior to any work on a hot tower.

When work is performed on a driven AM Tower or a tower with an AM skirt, the antenna base impedance can change by several Ohms resistive and/or reactive. (Your antenna base impedance value must be maintained within +/- 2 Ohms Resistance per your F.C.C. license and any change must be reported to the F.C.C.)



**Any detuning network on a skirt must be assessed and adjusted if tower work causes changes**

The Pre-work measurement establishes the tower base impedance Reference Value and the Post-work measurement is compared to that value to determine what, if any, change has taken place.

Should the base impedance of your antenna change you can demand that it be returned to the initial Pre-work value. You can also ask the tower leasing company to pay for the re-licensing of your radio station at the new antenna impedance value.

**C) Demand Pre and Post AM Signal Measurements prior to any work on the tower(s).**

Non-Directional AM stations should have several points along the four Cardinal bearings at distances between 2-10 km from the AM tower established as measurement points for the PRE-POST signal measurements. This is not necessarily the same as a Partial Proof that we are used to but is instead a pared down version of one that works well for before/after comparisons.

For AM Directional stations your assigned Monitor Points will work for signal measurement locations. Occasionally a MoM licensed AM Directional station will have “reference points” established to serve this purpose.

**OTHER RF ISSUES**

**A) RF Levels**

The FCC requires that all stations on a site know the total level of RF at any point on the site.

If one station makes changes and the overall level exceeds limits, *all the stations* on site may be liable for enforcement action and/or fines.

Any lease should include language to both protect and limit station changes to the transmission systems. You would want to be protected from actions by the tower leasing company as well as other stations. And, yet, you need to be aware, as much as possible, of what the others are doing.



## B) Warning Signs

One item that I believe is very important for everyone concerned is the posting of **Warning Signs**.

These signs should let all concerned parties – both professional and visitors – know that your AM radio station is operating from that tower and *the tower is hot*.

You should post these warning signs very near the tower base so tower climbers cannot avoid seeing it! The tower fence gate and the ATU are good locations.

As part of the signs, include your station's call letters and contact phone number on the sign so the tower climbers – or other trades people – can get in touch when they arrive. Note: While most of these signs were installed and forgotten, if there are any changes in call sign, phone number, or ownership, it would be smart to update them.

## COMMUNICATE!

Lastly, I would like to encourage you to get to know your Tower Site Manager so the two of you can work together to make your leasing arrangement work smoothly.

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