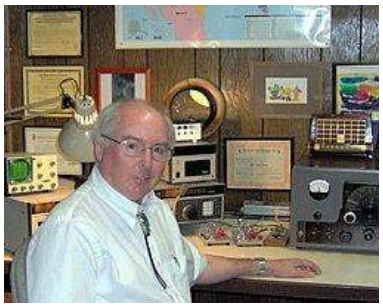


The
**Broadcasters' Desktop Resource**
www.theBDR.net ... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

# Focus on the FCC

## On the Road with an ABIP Inspector



***By Mike Langner***

*[May 2013] Here is a chance to follow along with an ABIP (Alternate Broadcast Inspection Program) inspector, Mike Langner. As you read on, you might well see some things that need attention at your station.*

*You might also chuckle a bit, as inspectors do see some mind-bending situations and get some amazing excuses. Oh yes, as hard to believe as it may be, these are true experiences.*

The Alternate Broadcast Inspection Program was set up to help stations stay in compliance with the FCC Rules and Regulations, and those avoid unpleasant experiences that can happen during an inspection by a Field Agent.

There are some real benefits – the ABIP inspector will not fine you, nor tell the FCC if you did fail in any area. He is there to help you get everything right, so he can issue a Certificate of Compliance

Even better: the FCC gives a 3-year inspection "pass" to stations that receive a Certificate of Compliance. When an inspector comes to a station with a certificate on the wall, he will usually say "Thanks. Have a good day!" and leave.

**SADDLE UP!**

*[SFX: Cue the "Dragnet"-style music]*

It was early summer. Our state broadcast association had just made up a new list of stations to be inspected as part of the Alternative Broadcast Inspection Program. My job was to inspect them. I am an ABIP Inspector. My name is Langner.

As I set out across our great state, one of my first stops was in a mostly tourist-oriented community. Here, I was assigned to inspect an AM and an FM station. Included was all the usual stuff on the FCC's inspection checklist – from the Station Authorization and Public File to EAS compliance to transmitter operations. You know: the essentials.

The FM station inspection went just fine. No violations were found at all. So I started the transmission equipment inspection on the AM station.

There was just one small problem that became apparently right away: there was no AM transmitter to be seen.

**JUST THE FACTS**

The station *was* on the air, all right. We could hear it loud and clear. But there was nothing in the building to explain the signal.

*"Oh, we moved the transmitter,"* said the station engineer. *"Very far?"* I asked. *"Just a ways out of town,"* was the answer.

So we piled into the engineer's car and drove for about 10 minutes. *"There she is,"* said the engineer. We got out of the car, went into the transmitter building and, sure enough, there was his transmitter – along with an FM transmitter or two and some two-way equipment.

A only took a quick look at the station's AM license to make it clear there was going to be trouble if this station wanted to be certified as being in compliance. The antenna current was only about 20% of what it should have been, although the input power was fine. More importantly, according to my GPS we were nowhere near the right place.

*"You see,"* said the station engineer, *"we moved the transmitter here to this tower for better coverage."*

**A SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT QUESTION**

*"Great idea … But have you notified the FCC?"* I asked.

*"Well, no,"* said the engineer. *"We didn't move the studio or anything, and we're still covering the town just like we always have, only better. And the reason the antenna current is different is that the antenna is now a folded monopole. The old tower was series fed."*

"*Oh,"* I responded. *"I think we have a small problem here."*

I explained that stations cannot just move transmitter sites because they think it is a good idea. Also, for the station to pass its ABIP inspection and receive a Certificate of Compliance, either the transmitter and antenna system would have to be moved back to its licensed site (and returned to its licensed operation) or the station would have to apply for a license modification for the current location and antenna configuration.

*"I'll let you know,"* said the engineer. It was the last words I ever heard from the engineer or from station management.

Whether or not an FCC field agent has caught up to this station and performed an official inspection is unknown at this time. However, one thing is certain: they *did not* get a Certificate of Compliance from me!

**THE METER PROBLEM**

Even if the transmitter is in the right place, it still seems hard these days to get folks to accurately read meters.

It gets even harder when the meter is nearly impossible to read.

I visited another AM station, one that had been hit by a lightning strike a few months prior to my inspection visit.



The station actually did very well except for a number of broken radial wires found around the tower – and an RF ammeter so small that it could not be accurately read.




**An RF meter – but is it big enough?**

FCC Rule 73.1215 sets forth the requirements for indicating instruments (meters) used to determine if a radio station is in compliance with power and other facets of the station's operation.

In case your copy of the Rules is not handy, the key part is 73.1215 (a)(1), which says: *Length of scale shall not be less than 2.3 inches (5.8 cm).*

Perhaps you would like to check the ruler above one more time!

This little AM station clearly had not read the Rules clearly – their base current ammeter was tiny!

I asked station management about the meter. *"Our engineer got us a deal on a surplus meter,"* the manager explained. *"Those bigger ones cost a whole lot more."*

The mini-meter cost this station its Certificate of Compliance. To my knowledge, the station never got a "real base current meter," and it certainly never passed the ABIP inspection.

Stay tuned! There is more to come.

Next time we will take a look at some more problems that can put station opera-tions in jeopardy, including one station where no one on the staff could be bothered to handle an important chore.

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*Mike Langner is an ABIP inspector. Based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he is a veteran engineer with some 50 years of broadcast experience.*

*Do you have a question about inspections? Contact Mike at mlangner@swcp.com*

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