



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Focus on Regulation

The Public Inspection File: The New Age of Public Files



By Adrienne Abbott

[August 2012] The FCC has begun requiring Public Inspection File information to be uploaded to their website. Anyone, anywhere will be able to view this information.

In an article for the [Nevada Broadcasters' Association](#), Adrienne Abbott explains what you need to know about this brave new world.

As this is written, it is August. 2, 2012, and the Internet is crackling with megabytes of information as television broadcasters upload their Public Information Files to their FCC websites.

The FCC has mandated perhaps the biggest change to the Public Inspection Files since the EEO was added – the Political Files from the Public Inspection File are now required to be on line for TV stations, phased in by market.

The announced goal essentially to put all Public Inspection Files on line – including those from radio stations – in the near future.

This second digital conversion has not been without controversy and negative comments about the broadcast industry.

However, the process that is underway will allow TV audiences as well as competitors like cable companies and satellite providers' access to some of the industry's most guarded secrets, including the special government-required lower rates politicians pay for the ads everyone says they do not like and will not watch but which must be run.

No other industry has such a government mandate to lay out the heart and soul of what we do like the broadcast industry in the form of the Public Inspection File.

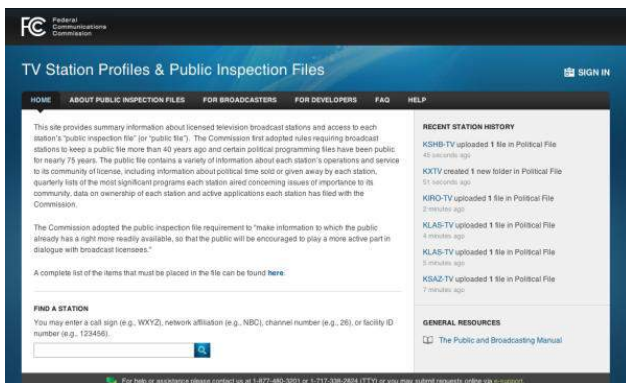
Now that this heart and soul will be on the Internet, without the context of a station environment or station staff to respond to questions and comments, how will this affect stations?

A BRAVE NEW WORLD?

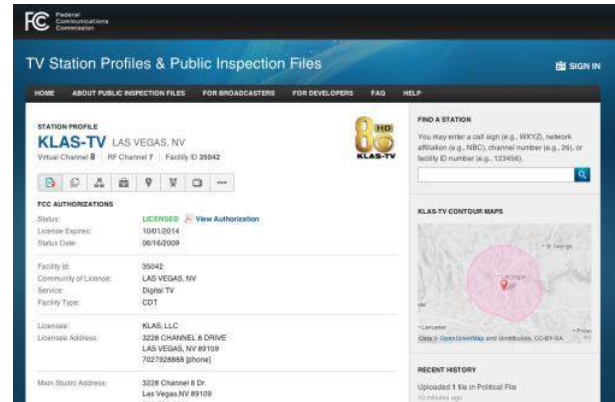
So it begins. TV stations start the upload process while radio stations will be next, possibly sometime next year.

The entire process is ongoing, despite a lawsuit filed by the NAB and other complaints that the FCC is moving too fast. Stations that have dealt with visitors trolling for information now must be ready for widespread access by various persons and entities, all looking for errors and omissions.

If you need more information on the actual process, check the [FCC website Public Inspection Files home page](#) where you can link to information and demonstrations. That will take you to the home page for Public Files.



Note that the FCC posts station's Public File uploading activity on the right side of the page. You will also find links to the list of items that need to be uploaded, including who has to upload Political material as well as information about the upload process.



PRE-POPULATION

Once on the FCC website, you will find that they have pre-populated your site with certain information including the Contour Map and folders for Federal, state and local political races. And for the first time in years, the FCC will display your station address and phone number as well as the names of staff contacts. You will also be able to add links to your website and an email contact.

While you have six months to upload all the material in your Public Inspection File, from here on out, anything that you would normally put in the physical Public Inspection File in your station must be uploaded to your "virtual" Public Inspection File on your FCC website.

This includes documents like your next Issues and Programs Quarterly Reports and Children's Programming reports such as those that are due on Oct. 10th. (TV stations should change the wording of your announcement on the public availability of your "KidVid" materials to indicate that those reports are now available on the FCC website.)

You should also put a link to your FCC website on your station website. Remember that your Quarterly Reports should go all the way back to your last license renewal and it will be obvious if any material is missing or files late.

Check with your FCC attorney if you have any questions.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

What happens to your paper Public Inspection File once it is uploaded?

Do not get rid of it just quite yet. No one knows how this process is going to work so after the upload, keep the paper material around and available for the time being.

In addition, there are some items like Letters from the Public which the FCC does not want on their website but which you are required to maintain and make available to the public.

Furthermore, not everyone has a computer or Internet access, so you are still required to make

your Public Inspection File available to the public either in paper form or electronically through a computer terminal.

Either way, you still have to be able to make copies of Public Inspection File material on demand.

As always, I am available to answer questions and help in this groundbreaking process but remember that I am not an FCC attorney and cannot give legal advice so keep your counsel's phone number handy!

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