

When the FCC Comes Knocking, Answer the Door! - \$10,000 Fines for Unattended Main Studios

February 14, 2012 by David Oxenford

The FCC's main studio rules require that broadcast stations have a main studio open during normal business hours. And, when the studio is open, it obviously needs to be manned so that someone is there to meet any visitors who may show up. And, sometimes, those visitors are from the FCC. When the FCC shows up, one would think that station employees would go out of their way to greet the inspectors and provide them what they want. But in two cases decided this week, that simply didn't seem to be the case, resulting in two notices of apparent liability proposing \$10,000 fines.

[One case involved a cable system](#) (which also has a public file obligation and a duty to make the file available during normal business hours), whose employees turned away FCC inspectors until a supervisory employee was present. In [a broadcast case](#), the FCC inspectors found an apparently unmanned building at what was supposed to be the station's studio site and, when a woman arrived who was apparently the wife of the owner, rather than letting the inspectors in to the building, she told them they would have to call her husband - who did not answer his phone. In responding to an FCC letter about the inspection that suggested that there was a violation, the licensee said that the inspectors erred by not ringing the door bell, and that employees come and go as they are needed, but are usually there during the day. After getting that response, the FCC inspectors returned to the station to conduct another inspection, and found no doorbell, and an office that was again empty.

Moral of the story? Have a manned main studio during normal business hours - something like 9 AM to 5 PM. Be sure that anyone visiting the station can get in the front door, and that anyone at the station greeting them knows what to do when visitors arrive - especially visitors from the FCC. Make sure that even a temp knows where the public file is, and that you actually keep such a file (see [this case](#), where the station's chief operator told the FCC inspectors that the station does not keep issues programs lists - resulting in a \$10,000 fine and an obligation to report to the FCC when the issues programs lists are completed each quarter). And make sure that anyone at the station knows how to get in touch with management at all times, so that someone can immediately deal with a request for a more thorough inspection. Especially when dealing with the FCC inspector at your door, you want to be ready and, for the most part, to give them what they want. A little planning now can save some big bucks down the road.

Tags: [FCC Fines](#), [FCC field inspection](#), [FCC inspection](#), [main studio rules](#), [main studio staffing requirements](#), [public inspection file](#)

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