



Rants from radio pirate make waves with FCC

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A Colorado Springs radio pirate's underground battle against the government hit a snag recently when the FCC learned of his sporadic illegal broadcasts.

Rick Craven ran a makeshift station out of his van, where he apparently lives, and was broadcasting anti-government rants on 95.5 FM, the frequency of a new pop station.

"The assumption is that this guy chose that frequency because it had been a vacant channel. And he didn't realize that the channel had been assigned to a new Clear Channel station KJQY out of Rocky Ford," Clear Channel General Manager Bob Gourley said.

Craven used his pirate broadcast to air a recorded message about "electromagnetic rays in the environment" that enable "secret technology" that "is categorized at the national security archives as radiation intelligence." This "computer-generated brain mapping can continuously monitor all activity in the brain."

Lisa Fawlkes, of the Federal Communications Commission enforcement department, said Craven received a warning letter.

She said she could provide no other information about the case.

Mario Valdes, general manager of public station KRCC (91.5 FM), says a radio pirate with similar anti-government rants has been stepping on his station's signal and those of other stations for the past year and a half.

"The only thing that Clear Channel or any radio company can do if we found out about one of these pirate stations, whether it was quite by accident or by happenstance, which is how they found this one . . . is call the FCC," Gourley said.

But that is not quite what happened.

Cruising the city in three vehicles, a team of knowledgeable radio operators not affiliated with the FCC tracked the radio pirate themselves, narrowing the search field using Doppler direction-finding equipment.

The team found Craven's locked van July 18 in a Safeway parking lot at Galley Road and Circle Drive.

The recording of Craven's message, which began around 8 p.m., had cut off at 10:30 p.m., but an interference buzz still dominated the frequency.

Team members unplugged the generator hooked to his van to determine whether they had found the source of the interference. They had.

The frequency was used again July 21 and the team followed the signal to the Grocery Warehouse at Monterey and South Circle Drive.

When the recordings went back on the air Tuesday morning from the same location, FCC agents out of the Denver field office got involved, performed their own tests, and, as Fawlkes confirmed, gave Craven a warning for the violations.

His equipment, estimated to be worth about \$1,000, was not confiscated.

The case is an open investigation and the FCC reportedly threatened to arrest Craven if he tries to air pirate broadcasts again.

He still could incur a hefty fine, though it would be difficult for the FCC to collect.

"They can't collect from people with radio stations," Valdes said with a laugh. "Is there anyone left on the planet who thinks the FCC has the least bit of credibility?"

"Radio station managers don't know how often radio pirates take to the airwaves or how many people listen to them, because the pirates often choose unassigned frequencies.

But when the signals overlap with those of licensed stations, it's an annoyance.

"Listeners don't know it's a pirate signal," Valdes said. "They just think one of your announcers has gone mad."

Craven could not be reached for comment.

The radio operators who found him asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal.