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The FCC and Haiti Tragedy

The Federal Communications Commission contributed strongly to the Haitian tragedy on January 12, 2010. No, the FCC did not cause the earth to quake. The FCC's role in this tragedy came after the earthquake.

How did the Federal Communications Commission intensify this tragedy? First there is some need for understanding what the role of the Commission has been in the Northern Hemisphere. All countries use the FCC for frequency allocations. Each country receives a request and it is then forwarded to the Commission to confirm that there are no conflicts with other stations. This sounds pretty good, doesn't it? The FCC is responsible for the Northern Hemisphere over to the International Date Line. Canada even sends requests through the FCC.

The Problem caused by the FCC: The FCC has fingerprints all over many of the problems we see today in the economy, but not all. The FCC moved the television band to UHF, ostensibly to reserve the VHF spectrum for emergency service during disasters such as the Haitian earthquake. However, these frequencies are not good for emergency services. A typical 3-watt transceiver cannot get through brick walls and other barriers. Broadcasters knew this and started screaming.

The FCC then came clean. They wanted to sell these frequencies to the highest bidder, receiving hundreds of millions of dollars for the use of this spectrum. Sorry emergency services; you are out of luck.

At the same time that this attack on over-the-air television started, the FCC started going after the amateur radio bands, literally stealing spectrum from the ham operators right and left. So?

You may remember in the past during similar disasters, it was amateur radio operators who got the word out that help was needed and what kind of help. Haiti has no ham operators, at least none that survived the disaster. All the relief agencies are working blind. Cell phones are out. The only things that worked immediately after the earthquake were satellite phones and portable satellite systems.

We all heard the officials say that information was unavailable. Relief efforts were being planned on guesswork. Not a good scenario.

If only the FCC had not gotten greedy and literally destroyed our broadcasting system. Ham operators as well as broadcast engineers responsible for radio stations would have been able to put together an old Desoto automobile with a Philco refrigerator and create some kind of device that would at least transmit Morse code. It could be a spark-gap transmitter similar to the electronic ignition on gas stoves.

This ignitor splatters the spectrum with a "spat" sound every time it fires. Use some more power and an antenna, and code can be sent. 100 watts at 20 feet would get the message out covering over 100 miles. There were no cries for help on the amateur radio bands, at least that we know.

How many thousands died needlessly because of the actions of the FCC. Let us be fair and admit that the Commission is as horrified as the rest of us over the devastation in Haiti. Yet, much of the after-event tragedy was caused by the Commission and its policies and actions.

And of course this is only the tip of the iceberg. The FCC created hundreds of cable channels that are not watched. Two hundred channels open up the commercial availability of about 14 million commercial positions a

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week. Often these sell for about \$1 for a thirty-second commercial. Coverage is even cheaper per viewer at the cable network level.

How does a newspaper sell a \$1,500 display page ad, let alone the \$15,000 page ad when cable is a "buck a :30". The newspapers and other print media need this money to pay for reporters. So do the TV and radio stations.

Again, the FCC is not the total villain for the print decline. The technology is changing, but the print media has been adapting and could succeed if the FCC had not purposefully corrupted the system by creating so many channels.

What is happening is all forms of communications are starting to be funneled through one switch that the FCC controls. Does anyone want this? Do we want our government to have the ability of China to throw a switch and cut off the flow of information?

Congress encouraged the FCC in this venture because they would get some of the money, too.

The Foundation urges a national investigation of the Federal Communications Commission, individually and collectively, as well as Congress; with the most serious consequences given to those responsible for this mess, even if they are no longer participating.

Also the FCC needs to be decommissioned and its responsibilities reverted to where it was first recommended, the Federal Trade Commission.

Let's save the people in Haiti, first. Then it is on to decommission the FCC and responsibly attribute blame with strong consequences to those whose actions contributed to the deaths of many Haitians. Then let us recreate a broadcasting system that works again.