

# Radio Programs

Radio is a member of the “Big Three” -- newspapers, television and radio. This electronic medium is very important to your water safety campaign. Stop and think for a moment. Which of the Big Three is the best one to put your message on the boat? Radio is the answer, and many Corps folks overlook its importance.

True, there are some drawbacks to radio, such as its messages are short-lived and if the tourist isn't listening to the exact station at the precise time, the radio message is gone forever. Television has the same shortcoming. Whereas newspapers have the edge in the “everlasting department.” Newspapers are read over and over.

But, where radio beats both newspapers and television is the positioning or targeting, time and place. On the lake you will spot radios galore, but few TVs. A few will be on large, expensive houseboats, but for the most part water enthusiasts are trying to get away from the tube. Once on the lake, the newspaper gets wet and many times blows off the boat into the lake. So, radio must be one of your targeting keys.

There are many differences you must understand about radio before “attacking.” For example, all radio stations are divided into one of two areas, AM or FM. And, some stations broadcast over both. AM means amplitude modulation. This form of radio transmission means the carrier wave is modulated by varying the amplitude above and below a standard value in accordance with the signals to be transmitted. FM is frequency modulation. This is a type of modulation in which the carrier wave of a transmitting system is varied in frequency rather than in amplitude. Therefore, on your radio sets you will see a FM/AM switch.

Another difference is the wattage of a station. Normally a small, rural radio station

will broadcast from dawn to dusk or to midnight. Their signal is usually 1,000 watts. Thus, this station's signal will not carry a great distance. Whereas, the giant 100,000 watt stations can be heard a long way, especially at night when the small stations are off the airwaves and do not block the larger station's signals.

Dawn to dusk stations have very small staffs that do everything. Usually, the staffers are underpaid and work long hours, even the station manager. These stations are hungry for local news and need time fillers. You should get to know them on a one-on-one basis and obtain a tremendous amount of airtime. So much, in fact, you could be overwhelmed if you are not careful. Seriously.

Larger radio stations have large staffs and are much better paid. It will be harder to build a one-on-one relationship with these folks, but it can be done. It will be much harder to obtain free airtime. There are so many, many organizations asking for donated time in the larger cities. If you plan ahead and work hard at getting your messages on any radio station, it can be done, but it's tough.

Another way the stations are different is the format. Some play country-western music, others rock 'n roll, easy listening, 50s and 60s oldies, jazz, classical and some small stations divide the day with different music. Remember too, some stations along the northern border of the United States have Canada~French speaking stations, while along the southern border they have Spanish speaking stations. There are some all black radio stations with a special format. Don't forget to work with them, also.

Besides the music formats, there are other differences, such as talk radio, where the host chats for a while and brings in

guests, then the audience calls in. There are some that have an outdoor or sports call in show. Here is where you could get your water safety show on the road, but be very careful with the call in show. If your program is only water safety, make sure the host mentions that fact up front so when the callers phone in the host will say, "I'm sorry, we are only discussing water safety today. We'll try and bring other Corps of Engineers folks on the show at another time." Be prepared to answer very tough questions about the lake.

Incidentally, whether you are on a call in radio talk show or talking to the radio station over the phone, always assume that the microphone is on. An FCC ruling permits radio stations to tape your telephone calls without informing you that they are doing so. Always assume the mike is on, and if there is a TV camera in the area, assume it is rolling; the new models do not have an "on" light. As an aside, if you are inexperienced at dealing with the media, get a copy of "So You're Meeting The Media," prepared by the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, Office of the Secretary of the Army, May 1980.

Now, if that call in radio talk show is about the lake, it's always a good policy to bring two or three lake experts to these type programs. They will be able to answer some questions while you are collecting your thoughts. An example, bring the quick thinking, knowledgeable folks who know the history of the lake, plus the most up-to-date plans for the future. They could be the lake's resource manager, power plant superintendent, ranger, maybe even the engineer who worked on the lake during construction. Prepare some tidbits of information for the host, so he or she will be able to keep the flow going in a professional way. You could have when the lake's authorization was approved by Congress; how much the project cost; how many acres were purchased; when the dedication took place; who was the keynote speaker and what did he or she say that was special. Did a celebrity perform at the reception, like singer/actress Dolly Parton did at Cordell

Hull Lake, in Carthage, Tennessee, during the mid-1970's?

While we're on talk radio, many stations bring in regular government guests. For example, Ben Franklin, Tennessee Wildlife Agency Officer, has a 15-minute show every Monday starting at 7 a.m., over Radio Station WILE, Smithville, Tennessee. Ben provides the listeners the latest changes in the state laws and he works with the local lake Corps manager to add information about upcoming events, too. Water Safety is always a topic on the show. The host Dwayne Page signs off with, "And we must remind our listeners, Ben, always put on the life jacket ... don't sit on it. See ya next Monday, so long, Ben."

Could you handle a weekly 15-minute program concerning the lake? They are great. Yes, it's possible, but tough. And, when you go on annual leave, who is going to appear on your show? Sure, you might bring a guest on the show every so often. They are great, but time consuming. Give it some thought and chat with the chief before making any commitments.

A few stations have a local personality who has a weekly one-hour program remote broadcast from a local restaurant. Some even have the person there five-days-a-week. These are naturals for your water safety campaign.

Remote broadcast may seem foreign to you, but to a radio station they are common occurrences. How many radio remotes can you think of? There's the high school and some university baseball, basketball and football games, parades, city and county commission meetings, school board meetings, and election coverage. You might be able to convince the radio station manager to send a remote to the lake for something; a cleanup, festival, or even the "Blessing of the Boats."

Most radio stations, both large and small, have 30-minute weekly public affairs programs. Normally, these are taped even a week or two in advance. Use these to get

your message out. You might be able to get a news release to the newspaper saying when the show will be aired and what will be discussed, but remember the newspaper and radio station are in direct competition for advertising dollars.

Some stations have a broadcast journalist who has a daily editorial. Most of these range from one-minute to five-minutes. Here is a perfect place to send your water messages to the public, free. You may need to draft some verbiage for the editorialist, but it will pay dividends. Radio personality/editorialist Al Voecks, of 100,000 watts WSDC, Nashville, presented it on Friday morning before Memorial Day ... at no cost Remember too, these are his water safety words, not yours, and in this case that's "A+" as a government official isn't demanding the public to do this or that, a local, regular broadcaster is saying it.

It's important to obtain as much free time as possible, because dollars are hard to come by and once you buy airtime, it is much, much harder to get it donated. Granted, it is nearly impossible to get prime time PSAs at the time and date you want Yes, you may get a few on the 1,000 watters, but it is so tough to get the big stations to give you the Friday morning drive-time slot for a PSA.

If you have only worked with one or two local stations and don't know where to start with the others, here's how. Get the telephone directory for each city or county. They are listed. Or, better yet, obtain a media directory from the major telephone company as noted in Chapter 22. Simply jot down the radio stations in every town surrounding the lake, the people there, their telephone numbers, and addresses. Listen to each station. Know their format and the air personalities before making your first visit As an ice breaker you might ask the person behind the desk, "Did you hear the lady's comment about the horse on John Anderson's morning show today?" This will let the person know you listen to their station and it will help. And, like billboards, look around for those helpful ice breakers,

like photos, plaques, or other memorabilia. What if the person is holding a largemouth in a photo on the wall with, "Big Fish Winner" on the bottom? Go up to the photo and say something like, "Wow, where and when did you catch that beauty?" Shortly, you will be "catching" water safety PSA airtime.

Here's an idea that could be a radio and newspaper and cable TV gold mine, if a Corps history buff would take the time to research it. It could be named, "What Did The Corps Of Engineers Do Today ... Way Back When?" (or something along those lines). Our Corps has such a lustrous history, in war and peace, in civil and military works, that it would be a tremendous experience and a learning tool, also. The author will need to get Corps history books and hide in a room for a week or two, all alone, without telephones ringing off the hook. A good research aid is Corps pamphlet EP 360-1-13, March 1978, "Historical Highlights of the United States Army Corps of Engineers." If you can locate a copy, use that to build upon with your local District highlights.

Start by laying out 12 papers on the computer or hardcopy, one for each month, and then list the daily events. All the big accomplishments would be easy, and then fill in the remaining dates with humorous tidbits, present day or recent events such as, "Today (June 17th) in the Corps of Engineers' history, lieutenant General Henry Hatch, nicknamed "Hank", became the 47th Chief of Engineers. After Senate confirmation, three-star General Hatch replaced lieutenant General E. It. (Vald) Heiberg III who served from September 1984 to June 1988." Then a little of the Chief's most notable background clips could be given for time/space fillers. Probably 50 or 60 words will be enough.

"How could this help me," you are saying. Just think, you could take a professionally designed cover page, with about 20 pages to the newspaper office to run one each day. A good contact will help you accomplish this task. If the newspaper is

a weekly, they might box your seven Corps days in the same spot each week. If you can locate a copy of the "Historical Highlights," or if you compile your own, simply meet with the editor in November and start the first of the year. If one editor says no, so what, there are many newspapers around the lake and it only takes one to print the history to get the ball rolling with others.

"How does it work for radio," you ask. About the same way, but it's a little harder to "sell," but it sure can be done. It will take a DJ to read it each day over the air, preferably at the same time or tape all 365 days at one time.

A prediction. One District will produce each of the 365/366 days of Corps history on

cassette tape a year after the history is written. Once this is accomplished it will make your job so much easier.

And, when the history's hard copy arrives, you should add the local lake history to make it much more appealing to your radio stations.

The cable TV personnel might put it on their daily calendar of events, too. See what a help a "Today in Corps History" will be? You have something to look forward to.

You might want to end your radio shows the same way each time, probably with the life jacket reminder. We'll be listening for you on the lake. Good luck with your radio shows.