

Aug. 1976

Detroit News Article

C B Radio

The FCC was taken by surprise by the extreme popularity of Citizens Band Radio which developed in recent months. Although the service was inaugurated back in 1958, its early growth was relatively slow and the Commission could cope with licensing and enforcement with the resources at hand. But, in 1975, CB was "discovered" by the public at large and rapidly became the runaway best seller it is today. In 1958, the Commission issued 38,611 licenses. In 1975, there were 1,530,824 new licensees. In 1976, license applications have been coming in at the rate of about 600,000 per month. We estimate that some 12 million persons are legally operating CB transceivers today and can reasonably predict that number will rise to as high as 50 million over the next two years.

Of course, this rapid growth has meant problems for CB users, manufacturers and the FCC. The Commission is struggling to catch up with the demand for licenses and seeking better tools for enforcement of the rules. The manufacturers are struggling to meet the heavy demand for equipment. And, the users are trying to cope with increasing congestion and interference. And, with the proliferation of CB sets in use, citizens are increasingly being annoyed by interference with television and stereo home entertainment equipment.

The FCC is very aware of the problems introduced by this explosive growth of CB. And, every reasonable effort is being made to deal with those problems so that the service will continue to grow and improve. The Commission is convinced that CB is a good service which provides many benefits to the public and we are determined to meet our responsibility to make it available to citizens who meet the minimal qualifications.

We have recently inaugurated an interim licensing procedure to permit purchasers of new CB sets to legally begin transmitting almost immediately. We realize that the long delays experienced in waiting for licenses to be issued have often resulted in illegal, unlicensed operation. Our new FCC Form 555B has been distributed to our field offices around the country and it is designed to eliminate that temptation. The new CB operator now may begin operation immediately upon mailing his application for a permanent license to the FCC. At the same time, we are working very hard to reduce the time required to process the permanent licenses.

At the present time, we have on file between 5,000 and 6,000 license applications for which the fees have been paid which we have been unable to return to the licensees. They have been returned to us by the post office for various reasons such as incorrect addresses, the addressee has moved without leaving a forwarding address, etc.

As might be expected, there are a few individuals who choose not to abide by the few simple rules we have set to maintain the integrity of the service. It's clear that more enforcement efforts will have to be made. We are asking Congress for a change in the law to permit us to levy fines against unlicensed operators. At the present time, we must call upon the Department of Justice to assist in dealing with unlicensed operators and we believe that procedure places an unnecessary burden upon that department and results in a lower level of enforcement than is desirable.

CB has, unquestionably, become a permanent part of the American scene. We will make more spectrum available for the service within the next six or eight months. The Commission has adopted two Notices of Proposed Rule Making anticipating expansion of spectrum for CB use. Docket 19759, initiated in June of 1973, contemplates expansion into a new frequency band (224-225 MHz). The time for comments and reply comments in that docket has passed. Late in March 1976, the Commission issued a Notice of Inquiry and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making in Docket 20120 to examine proposals that the Class D service be expanded. Some potential technical problems have arisen in the Class D expansion and we are seeking comments from interested persons relative to those problems and their solutions as well as various other matters affecting Class D expansion. Comments are due on or before May 26, 1976, and reply comments on or before June 10, 1976.

The Commission's Office of Plans and Policy has begun a series of planning studies looking to long-term development of CB radio. Among the options to be considered are opening new frequencies in the 200 MHz and 900 MHz portions of the spectrum where sunspot activity would not affect propagation.

We will improve our licensing and enforcement procedures in the months ahead. And, the manufacturers will continue to improve and expand upon the equipment they provide. It is the user, however, who will ultimately determine what kind of a service CB will be in five years, ten years and beyond. With a little self-discipline, consideration for the rights of others and understanding of the problems generated by very rapid growth, I believe that we'll be able to enjoy a very worthwhile CB service in the months and years ahead.