

Extraordinary Circumstances Justifying Extension of STA

WDEF-TV, Inc., licensee of WDEF-TV, Chattanooga, Tennessee, is requesting an extension of its currently outstanding special temporary authority to operate from a smaller tower immediately adjacent to its licensed tower, which also is specified in its construction permit for repack facilities, File No. 0000026651. WDEF-TV's initial plan had been to construct its repack facilities on its currently licensed tower by removing its pre-repack antenna and replacing it with a new antenna at the same height. This plan, however, required that the supporting tower either be reinforced to bring it into compliance with current building codes and safety standards or replaced altogether. WDEF-TV had anticipated that this work could be done and new facilities completed prior to the end of Phase 10.

What WDEF-TV did not anticipate, however, were the delays caused by restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of travel and other restrictions, it initially was not possible for the necessary engineers to visit the site to make the determinations about how to proceed with either reinforcement or replacement of the tower or for tower construction workers to rebuild or reinforce the main tower. Those delays meant that the only practical solution was to move the WDEF-TV facilities to an adjacent, shorter tower. Consequently, WDEF-TV sought and was granted its current STA.

While the travel restrictions loosened sufficiently to allow planning to move forward, continuing off-and-on shutdowns in various states, as well as backlogs in accumulated work to be done, have resulted in manufacturing delays for both the steel needed for the tower and the antenna itself. Additionally, because of the delay in the manufacturing of the reinforcement steel, the tower crew was diverted to other jobs until the steel could be ready. Moreover, it was impossible to schedule a date for the tower crew until it was known when the steel would be delivered. These further delays have made it impossible for WDEF-TV to complete construction of its new facilities as authorized by the repack construction permit by the current deadline and STA expiration date of December 30, 2020. Accordingly, an extension of the existing STA is hereby being sought.

WDEF-TV currently anticipates that the steel need to complete the tower reinforcements and the new antenna will to be on-site on January 6, 2021. The tower crew is scheduled arrive on January 4, 2021 to set up and rig the tower to move forward with the tower modifications. It is anticipated that this process and antenna installation will take about four weeks. Of course, in light of the station's location in Tennessee and the time of year, some delays due to icy weather can also be expected, although the extent of any such delays cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty at this time. Nonetheless, WDEF-TV believes that the construction of the new facilities can be completed in no more than 90 days after the current deadline, and perhaps in as few as 60 days after that date. In the interim, however, in order to continue operating, an extension of the WDEF-TV STA is needed and requested.