

THE WGOX-LD REPACK EXPERIENCE – TO DATE

The universal expectation was that a new antenna would be mounted in place of the old, a transmitter would be plugged in, and broadcasting would resume: Nothing would change but the channel. But:

The weather, headlined by one hurricane after another all down through the alphabet, unrelenting rain, the repeatedly washed out road to the site, the pandemic, and Murphy's Law conspired to make the project unbelievably and arduously long.

The pandemic came into play by repeatedly shutting down the antenna factory in California in 2020. Funding became available to the station late in the over-all repack program, so the production delays really disadvantaged the station, missing out on the market re-scanning campaigns of the big stations.

Nevertheless, when the antenna was received in mid October, 2020, just days after still another Gulf storm had blown through, it was promptly mounted, connecting to the old transmission line. By November 2020 we had the new transmitter in the building. But the concrete and steel transmitter building, built 40 years earlier to federal specifications for the Emergency Broadcasting System, had succumbed to the forces of nature and rain was pouring in through openings in the roof forcing work to be done under a tent to protect the transmitter. We receive 69 inches of rain- more than that of any other city in the country- each year. The electrician was not too happy installing the new electrical service while the floor was being flooded with water. At one point water was even pouring out of the breaker panel – while it was hot. We finally did get the transmitter facility secured but it did cause delays.

Then we learned that the old AT&T program link was not only dead, AT&T did not offer such service at the site anymore. It had been removed, along with all their cellular antennas and equipment, from the site while the station was silent. We had to scramble to solve the “last mile” problem to rebuild the program link.

Parts of the old transmitter had to be re-used and mated with the new transmitter. We did manage to energize the antenna before the end of the year and found that it took power nicely. Since then, sadly, the signal over the city has been a disappointment compared with that of the prior facility. Field strength measurements, including an airborne drone study on March 15, 2021, have not led us to a final conclusion, but show the antenna needs to be re-mounted, and the transmission line, which has a splice in it, needs to be replaced. The Coax has been on site since March 29, 2021. These critical items of tower work are in the works at this writing, having been the subject of extended discussions with the tower owner involving greatly increased insurance requirements for tower companies. The insurance company declined to issue a COI to a tower company to do the job while storm Fred was in the Gulf.

Then there has been the usual, possibly more than usual, series of early failures of new-equipment – compounded by shipping delays from over-seas parts sources. We observed that one of the output devices in a new transmitter power amplifier was fading: The transmitter log records that on March 22, 2020, it had dropped from the initial 5 Amps down to 3.1. On June 17 it was recorded at 1 Amp. The fan assembly failed on that Power amplifier and when it was replaced and powered up, the device was found to be totally out and Anywave was notified on July 20. Since then, we have made an agreement with Anywave to have the amplifier, 50% of the transmitter output, repaired. We re-configured the transmitter to continue on-air with reduced power and have so notified the Commission.

And the pandemic, ironically, is still very much a factor with the station because the plans are to make several of the station's channels available for home-bound education for the duration of the pandemic.

To be sure, with transmitter facility now environmentally secured, dried in, air filtered with a custom built high-volume low-velocity HEPA-13 filter, program link stabilized, and the drum roll of new transmission line at the tower, ready for mounting, we can finally see the project finish line ahead and only days away, subject to weather conditions are safe for climbers.

As soon as the technical work is verified complete, the market re-scan campaign can begin to bring the station to reality on TV sets.

Howard Smith
EIC for WGOX-LD Repack

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