



NASB NEWSLETTER

www.shortwave.org

February 2003

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Comet North America joined the NASB as an Associate Member in December 2002.

Introduction to Comet North America By Jeff Watkins

COMET was founded in 1948 as a manufacturer of X-ray tubes in Bern, Switzerland. In 1965, COMET began designing and building top-quality innovative capacitors for the broadcast industry. Today, COMET capacitors are used in many unique applications:

- AM, medium and shortwave broadcast and communications transmitters
- Antenna tuning units or couplers in avionics and mobile equipment
- Plasma deposition and etching equipment for the semiconductor manufacturing industry
- Industrial high frequency generators for drying and sealing
- Nuclear fusion research and high energy particle accelerators

- Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging system

In 1993, COMET North America was opened to better serve the blossoming new application for capacitors in Plasma deposition and etching. Today, COMET North America distributes over 50% of COMET's capacitors. COMET North America stocks over \$2 million worth of inventory to support our customers.

COMET capacitors have been standard equipment in most European-made transmitters (Thales, BBC, Marconi, Telefunken) since the late-60s. Not until COMET North America was opened did the US transmitter manufacturers begin choosing COMET capacitors as an alternative. In recognition of our quality craftsmanship and superior reliability, COMET capacitors are now standard equipment in all major transmitters manufacturers including Harris Broadcasting and Continental Electronics transmitters. COMET North America is also a major supplier for Kintronic Laboratories, TCI, IBB/Voice of America and several shortwave stations.

To better serve our customers, we have increased our production space in 2001 and doubled monthly production capability for our 25kv and higher capacitors. In 2002, we moved into a new production facility that allows us to double all our production capability again.

Since many of the existing transmitters were not installed with COMET capacitors, we have worked closely with the transmitter manufacturers or friendly transmitter sites to develop Capacitor Replacement Guides for the most popular transmitters. We are interested in working with other sites to further expand our list of guides. These guides are available on our website at www.comet.ch.

COMET is world renowned as a company where traditional Swiss craftsmanship meets modern technology. Our team is looking forward to helping you in the near future.

Preview of 2003 NASB Annual Meeting

The NASB 2003 Annual Meeting is scheduled for May 2 at the Crowne Plaza in Arlington, Virginia.

A block of rooms is reserved at \$125.00 per night. This rate is available by mentioning NASB. The cut-off date is April 1. Call 703-416-1600 (NOT the 800 number) and ask for the Reservations Office. A registration fee of \$50.00 (\$25.00 for each additional person from the same organization) will be charged to cover luncheon and other expenses. A more detailed notice of the particulars will be distributed separately.

The sessions anticipated include a report on the preparations for WRC-03 by Don Messer, an update on the final recommendations of the IWG-6 committee by Walt Ireland, Kim Elliot speaking about audience research, a DRM update by Mike Adams, reports on the recent HFCC conferences from Doug Garlinger and Jeff White, reports from John Wood and several colleagues about doings at the IBB, and a presentation by TCI/Dielectric. As usual, there may be several changes in agenda by the time of the Annual Meeting.

February DRM Update **By Mike Adams**

ITU Approval for MW & LW

The ITU acted with speed that is unusual for an organization of this type as it approved digital modes for use on MW and LW in all ITU regions. The approval for MW/LW has required a different regulatory approach than SW and it was feared that it could drag on for years. The approval which came in January allows operation in digital modes on assigned frequencies, but still requires local government approval.

DRM Software Receiver

The software receiver mentioned in the last update has been selling well to DXers and Hams in the USA and Europe. The forum (www.drmtx.org) is quite active and has a section to share tips and hints on converting general coverage receivers for operation with the software decoder. There are conversion plans posted for about a dozen receivers and I am planning to convert my IC-735. If you would like to see the software RXer in action it will be on display at the **Winter SWL Fest, March 7-8 in Kulpville, PA.** (www.swlfest.com) There will be live demonstrations from Bonaire and Sackville.

Launch at WRC03 Geneva

The official launch of DRM will happen in Geneva in conjunction with WRC03 when final approval for DRM on SW is expected. There may be up to a dozen SW stations beaming towards Geneva when they “throw the big switch” to begin regular broadcasts. Regular consumer radios are still a bit behind with DSP based radios aiming for the market at Christmas 2004 and IC Chip based radios at Christmas in 2005. There are at least 3 transmission providers who will rent airtime towards Europe for NASB members who want to join in on the launch but do not have DRM equipment. Perhaps a NASB group deal could be arranged?

FIRST HFCC CONFERENCE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA CALLS ATTENTION TO SHORTWAVE ON THE CONTINENT

by Jeff White, NASB Vice President



Africa is one of the principal target areas of many major international shortwave broadcasters. Despite the rapid development of local FM broadcasting in this area, shortwave radio remains the only practical means of receiving news, information and entertainment for millions of Africans who live in smaller cities and rural areas where local AM and FM radio are non-existent or not audible.

Yet despite the large penetration of shortwave radio in sub-Saharan Africa, the High Frequency Coordinating Committee (HFCC) had never held a meeting in

the region until the A03 conference February 3-7, 2003. The idea was to call attention to shortwave broadcasting to and from Africa, and to encourage more African shortwave broadcasters to participate in the HFCC frequency planning process.

The joint HFCC/ASBU (HFCC and Arab States Broadcasting Union) Conference was sponsored by the South African communications provider Sentech and took place at the Hilton Hotel in Sandton, a wealthy suburb of Johannesburg. In the end, relatively few African stations participated in the meeting, perhaps due to the fact that most of the shortwave broadcasting originating from Africa is aimed at domestic audiences. Major international HF broadcasters from Africa, such as Radio Cairo and Channel Africa, are few and far between. Nevertheless, the 140 or so representatives of international HF broadcasters gathered in Sandton had a rare opportunity to gain first-hand experience in one of shortwave broadcasting's primary target areas.



The South African government-owned Sentech, along with their contractor Eventdynamics, proved to be an expert in organization and a very good host for the gathering. Dr. Sebileto Mokone-Matabane, CEO of Sentech, officially opened the conference on February 3, followed by welcoming remarks from Peter

de Klerk, Special Advisor to South Africa's Minister of Communications. De Klerk was hopeful that this meeting could be the beginning of a regular regional HF coordination conference for Africa. "Shortwave broadcasting," he said, "will continue to be an important and often the only method of transmitting news, information and entertainment to much of Africa." De Klerk mentioned that the country's official international radio service, Channel Africa, is being restructured, with program production now originating from countries throughout the continent.

In his opening remarks to the Conference, HFCC Chairman Oldrich Cip noted the presence of representatives from Uganda and Lesotho. He expressed the hope that even if it is not practical for most African stations to attend future conferences, more shortwave stations from the continent might be able to at least submit frequency requirements on a regular basis as non-members, just as some major Latin American broadcasters are now doing with the assistance of the NASB. Mr. Cip noted the presence for the first time of a delegate from Cuba.

Oldrich Cip also pointed out that constant improvements are being made in the HFCC software for reporting requirements and determining potential collisions (i.e. co-channel or adjacent-channel interference). After the A03 conference, he said that operational schedules will now be updated continuously. Oldrich mentioned the HFCC's IRUS monitoring project, and said that "preliminary results are that the inaccuracies are much greater than we previously thought." These schedule "inaccuracies" are the result of so-called "wooden" transmitters that are listed in stations' operating schedules, but are not really on the air. Fortunately, however, the wooden frequencies are limited to relatively few administrations, and Oldrich said the HFCC Steering Board would be contacting those stations directly to attempt to improve the accuracy of future HFCC schedules.

Also at the opening session, HFCC Steering Board member Jan Willem Drexhage explained a bit about a new web-based option for submitting station schedules that will be available in the near future, along with the present e-mail submissions. The new system was tested for the first time at the conference in Sandton. Certain modifications were also being made to the collision lists to indicate new collisions and deleted collisions during the week of the conference.

After the opening session, the week-long conference got into full swing with the beginning of the coordination activities, where participants -- mostly hovering over laptop computers -- checked and re-checked their own stations' requirements and collisions with other stations. Then began the negotiating process with other

participants to try to eliminate as many collisions as possible before the end of the week.

These negotiations are technical, of course, but they are also very diplomatic. Sometimes they are very sensitive and difficult; other times they are quite simple and cordial. For example, I was involved in the elimination of an adjacent-channel collision that was shown between NASB member WSHB on 6095 kHz and the Caribbean Beacon (on Anguilla) on 6090 kHz. Both stations were beaming to the same target area (the Caribbean) for one overlapping hour from 1000-1100 UTC. Actual monitoring prior to the conference showed that the Caribbean Beacon was signing off at 1000 UTC instead of 1100, so there was no collision currently. However, if the Beacon were to change the sign-off time to 1100 with the beginning of the A03 season, a potentially messy collision would occur with WSHB for the hour from 1000-1100 UTC. In the end, it turned out that the change of sign-off times for the Caribbean Beacon from 1000 to 1100 UTC was a miscalculation because the station always signs off at 6:00 a.m. local time year-round, and Anguilla stays on UTC -4 all year, which means the sign-off time remains 1000 UTC during the entire year. So in this case, there never really would have been a collision. The time was corrected on the schedule, and the collision on paper was automatically eliminated.



NASB associate member Ludo Maes of TDP (left), George McClintock of the Caribbean Beacon (center), and Jeff White in Sandton

Another collision involved WSHB and the Voice of Greece. I had the opportunity to work with Andy Rook of Merlin Communications (which coordinates WSHB's frequencies) on this one. We both went together to see the Greek delegation and were able to cordially resolve the problem quite promptly. In the case of the

HFCC Conference, the engineers who attend also learn to be good diplomats, and this makes it much easier to resolve frequency conflicts.

NASB member WMLK was shown to have several collisions in Europe on its newly-planned frequency of 9955 kHz. But consultations with Bernd Friedewald, who handles the station's frequency management, found that the collisions all involved what Bernd expected to be "wooden" entries from European stations, so it was considered that no serious clashes were really likely to occur.

Before going to Johannesburg, several of our NASB members had been in touch with me regarding their A03 schedules. Some wanted me to check their submissions to see if they were entered correctly in the HFCC master lists. Others wanted me to take some action regarding collisions, such as changing times, frequencies and target areas. In some cases, they wanted me to work with their frequency management organizations that were also on hand at the conference. Still others wanted to be issued passwords so that they could check the lists posted on the global area of the HFCC website. As a result of discussions that began at the HFCC Conference in Bonn in February of 2002, the HFCC has recently agreed to allow frequency managers of NASB member stations to access those restricted areas of the HFCC website in order to help eliminate more collisions before they occur.

Even at a highly technical conference like the HFCC, there will be technical problems and issues. Portable laptop users had to have converters for 220 volts and adapters for the special electrical plugs that are used in South Africa. Despite pre-planning in this regard, the laptop brought by Tom Lucey, head of the FCC delegation (of which NASB is a part), stopped working after about the first day or so, forcing him to use the shared "public" computers which Sentech had thoughtfully provided at the rear of the conference room to make daily updates to the FCC requirements. Those shared computers all had Internet connections, enabling conference participants to access web sites and e-mail accounts, although the Internet infrastructure in southern Africa is still apparently somewhat limited, and connections were at times quite slow, and some e-mail messages seemed to disappear into the ether without explanation. Perhaps this served to emphasize the point that shortwave radio is still a much more reliable and practical way to reach millions of Africans than the ultramodern Internet, which is still out of reach for most of them.



Tom Lucey (left), head of FCC delegation, with the author

The frequency coordination work continued throughout the five days of the conference. But there were occasional presentations and seminars as well. For example, there was an update on DRM (digital shortwave broadcasting), a seminar for those interested in participating in the IRUS monitoring program (the HFCC's comparison of its own databases with what's really on the shortwave bands), and a workshop by Hai Pham of the ITU on how to use new software programs to report stations' frequency requirements. A summary of the DRM presentation will soon appear on the public area of the HFCC's website (www.hfcc.org).

The two main social events on the conference agenda were a Sentech cocktail on Tuesday afternoon at the Hilton Hotel, and the Wednesday night hospitality dinner, also sponsored by Sentech. Chartered buses took conference participants, friends and family members about an hour outside of Johannesburg to a place called Lesedi Cultural Village, where they were treated to a presentation of traditional folk dancing by the principle ethnic groups in South Africa, followed by an African-style buffet dinner featuring such specialties as ostrich stew, crocodile and impala meat, as well as a good selection of South African wines. (There was more traditional international cuisine as well for the light-of-heart.) It is at these social functions that the frequency planners from far-flung countries often become the best of friends. As Chairman Oldrich Cip commented, "we'll remember these moments for a long time to come."



Chief of Lesedi cultural village greets HFCC participants

For the most part, the conference coordination work winds down by the time of the Plenary Session on Thursday afternoon. This is where the various committees report on the work they've done since the last conference, and plans for the near future. It was announced that the deadline for submission of operational schedules for the A03 season will be March 14, 2003. The B03 HFCC Conference will be held in Norway (exact city not decided yet, but probably not Oslo) August 25-30, 2003. The final date for submission of requirements for that conference is July 18, 2003.

The ASBU (Arab States Broadcasting Union) confirmed that it will host the A04 HFCC/ASBU Conference in the United Arab Emirates beginning on February 9, 2004. When asked about security concerns, Bassil Ahmad Zoubi of the ASBU explained that the UAE is one of the most secure countries in the world, with minimal crime, and besides "the annual shopping festival will be taking place in Dubai at that time." The A04 conference will be a joint meeting with the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union.

The Russian delegation announced that it is hoping to host the B04 HFCC Conference, and hopes to be able to confirm this within a short period of time.

Jan Willem Drexhage reported that the HFCC's new collision software will enable users to choose different options, and he reported on a "very successful experiment" with a wireless LAN system that was used at the Sandton conference to distribute data throughout the conference hall without the need to use conventional diskettes. He said the HFCC software will use a series of standard three-letter language codes in the future, to allow the inclusion of more language information for each transmission.

Geoff Spells of VT Merlin Communications reported on the World Administrative Radio Conference (WRC-03) to be held at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva from June 9-July 4, 2003. He explained that there are three subjects on the conference agenda concerning HF broadcasting. Item 1.2 involves the incorporation of digital emissions into the radio regulations. There are no real issues here, but the wording of the regulations must be changed. Item 1.23 covers various proposals for the realignment of the spectrum around 7 Megahertz to allow amateur radio operators extra space. One of the proposals is for no change to the present allocations, "and this may likely be the outcome," said Geoff Spells. The third item, 1.36, involves extra spectrum space that HF broadcasters desire between 4 and 10 MHz, but this may be postponed until a subsequent WRC. An update on these issues should appear on the HFCC website (www.hfcc.org) shortly, as will a document about power line interference to HF broadcasting, which is seen as a major issue in Europe.

At the Plenary Session, HFCC Chairman Oldrich Cip announced that as a result of the IRUS monitoring results, the Steering Board had made informal contacts with nine organizations regarding inconsistencies between submitted schedules and monitoring results. Some of the inaccuracies noted by IRUS were from FCC-licensed broadcasters, so NASB members should take note of this in regard to submission of future schedules. "The overall result has been very positive," said Oldrich. "All countries have agreed to start the new season free of wooden frequencies and transmissions." Oldrich mentioned that a new IRUS monitoring campaign will take place in May 2003, and any inaccuracies will be reported to the countries involved.

The HFCC's routine financial matters were discussed briefly by Dennis Thompson, and two new organizations will be invited to attend as observers at the next conference. One of them is Broadcasting Center Europe, which is the continuation of the well-known station Radio Luxembourg, which wishes to resume shortwave broadcasts with a powerful transmitter on the 49-meter band.

The other new applicant is a consultant who plans to coordinate frequencies for international radio broadcasting from Taiwan.

Among the news from member stations, Dick Whittington of FEBA Radio reported that their Seychelles shortwave station will have to cease transmissions at the end of the winter season "due to financial and environmental reasons on the island." However, he said FEBA will continue its shortwave transmissions via the facilities of other stations. Doug Weber of HCJB in Ecuador announced that their new sister station in Australia has just recently gone on the air, and is experiencing transmitter and antenna "teething problems" which have the station on and off the air at the present time. Bassil Ahmad Zoubi of the ASBU explained that one of the organization's members, Algiers, has ceased shortwave broadcasts "until further notice" because of technical problems.

The final day of the HFCC Conference was a half-day of coordination work on Friday, February 7, followed by a farewell cocktail after the official closing at noon. Unfortunately, I had to miss the closing session in order to take advantage of an invitation to visit Channel Africa in the nearby Johannesburg suburb of Auckland Park. Channel Africa occupies an entire floor of the impressive SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) building. For many years now its emphasis has been on providing a news and current affairs service in several languages to Africa (primarily sub-Saharan Africa) on shortwave, but it is also available via the Internet in other parts of the world. Many cooperative programming projects with other African broadcasters have made Channel Africa more than a voice of just South Africa. The station now calls itself "the Voice of the African Renaissance." (More information is available at www.channelafrica.org.)



Finally, HFCC Conference delegates were encouraged by the organizers to take advantage of the long distances most of them had travelled to take some time before going home to see a bit of South Africa. A well-staffed travel desk was on hand all week long to assist delegates with booking short tours to local sites around Johannesburg (such as Soweto and some excellent game parks), as well as longer tours to locations such as the popular Kruger National Park (one of Africa's premier safari locations), Cape Town (South Africa's most dynamic tourist city) and even the spectacular Victoria Falls in the neighboring country of Zimbabwe.



The Cape of Good Hope, where the Atlantic and Indian oceans meet

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National Association of Shortwave Broadcasters

10400 NW 240th Street, Okeechobee, Florida 34972

Ph: (863) 763-0281 Fax: (863) 763-8867 E-mail: nasbmem@rocketmail.com