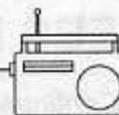


How Safe is Your Station?

Gordon Carter — Chief Engineer, WFMT, and Owner, Professional Audio Service



As you read the title of this article, you are probably thinking to yourself "Sure, it's safe. The transmitter and tower are locked and secured with a fence and alarm system. No one can get in that doesn't belong." You're probably right. Most people only think of safety at a radio station in terms of the transmitter. The problem is that most of your staff and visitors never get to the transmitter, but you have lots of traffic at your studios and offices. Let's look at the matter of safety there.

First of all, let's look at some of the more obvious things. Smoke detectors are cheap and reliable, and are required in many towns and cities. Does your facility have smoke detectors in appropriate places? Are the batteries fresh? If you aren't sure where to put smoke detectors, check with your local fire department. They would much rather help you place smoke detectors than have to drag someone out of a burning building. Batteries in smoke detectors should be changed at least once a year. Some suggest changing your batteries when the time changes (twice a year). I like to do it the first day back of the new year. Either way, change your batteries.

While we are looking at the matter of fire safety, how about fire exits? Are they clearly marked and accessible? I have seen emergency exits blocked by boxes and unused equipment. After all, that little alcove is just the right size for all that junk. If you aren't located in a larger town or city, it is unlikely that you will ever see a fire inspector. If you have ever had the pleasure of a visit by a fire inspector you know that about the only thing more unpleasant is a visit by the FCC or a root canal. The ones I have met can be tough as nails. They look at every little thing and make sure it is all right. If it isn't, they give you a list and come back later to check to make sure it has all been corrected. Do yourself a favor and have your own fire inspection before they come. Make sure those fire exits are open and work properly. I have seen some places where the fire doors couldn't be opened even if they had to. They hadn't been used in so long that they were rusted shut. While you're checking the fire exits, make sure they are properly marked. If they have exit signs, make sure the bulbs work properly. One more thing to check in your fire inspection: Make sure that your fire extinguishers (if you have them) are in good working order and recently inspected. They need to be checked once a year by a qualified technician.

While a visit by a fire inspector is no fun, your local fire department would rather prevent fires than put them out. If there is a fire, they would rather not have to pull people out

of a burning building (Yes, I said that already.). They have literature that will help you make sure your building is as safe as possible. They may even come out to help get things in good order. A quick phone call can get a lot of help. Just don't call 911 (or whatever your local emergency number is). Look in your phone book for the fire department's non-emergency number and call that.

Now that we've looked at fire safety, let's check out some other safety items. Check the carpet in your facility. Does it have any loose edges, tears, or snags? If you don't have carpeting, do you have any broken floor tiles or loose boards? Check your floors carefully for anything that someone could trip on. Not only could someone get hurt, but they could end up suing the station. That could eventually cost you and the entire staff their jobs.

Another item that seems to be overlooked in a safety inspection is the office chairs. Check the casters on the chairs to make sure they operate freely. Make sure the wheels turn on their axles and swivel freely. Time and use can create flat spots on the wheels and make the balls in the bearing fall out. A bad caster can snag and throw someone off the chair. Again, someone could be seriously hurt under the right circumstances. If that someone is your night guy, it could be hours before anyone knows he even needs help.

As you walk around your station, how many blind spots are there where people can collide in the halls? How about a busy doorway with no window? If two people are going through the door in different directions at the same time in a hurry they could have a nasty collision. You may want to consider putting a window in the door.

Corners are another potential blind spot. A strategically located mirror may be the answer to this problem. If you need a mirror, check your local hardware store or building supply house. If they don't have something suitable, get a catalog from an industrial supply place. Along with hand carts and other material handling equipment they have safety mirrors. A few dollars spent here may save hundreds in medical bills.

Another place that is a potential danger is a storage room or basement. Often things are stacked high and carelessly. As someone tries to reach something on the top, the whole pile can fall. If things are stacked on shelves, make sure the shelves are properly assembled and securely mounted. I once knew a man who was cleaning his garage. As he went to move something from the top shelf the whole thing fell on him. He fell from a ladder and things fell on top

(continued on page 9)

How Safe is Your Station?

Continued from page 8

of him. His head was injured and he spent quite a while in the hospital. After he got out, he was never quite the same. That is what can happen if you aren't careful about stacking things.

Probably some of the worst offenses in many radio stations are electrical. Perhaps we get so used to dealing with electricity that we forget how dangerous it can be. We make sure the transmitter is secured and interlocked, and wouldn't even think of putting our hand in it without first grounding things. But at the studio we carelessly plug things in without a safety ground. I have seen radio stations loaded with ground lifts (those little adapters that you plug a three-prong plug into and the ground pin is connected to a little tab or wire) or, if they were trying to be a little sneakier, the ground pin removed from the AC plug. Those things are put there for a good reason, not just to make your life miserable. I have heard all kinds of excuses for this, but it is a violation of virtually all electrical codes. Another ground path may serve the same purpose, but does not provide the same level of safety. Using the ground in the cord and plug assures that the item is grounded whenever power is applied. Other grounds may come off, and then there may be trouble. I know that it is sometimes difficult or even impossible to get things to work without humming when you use the ground in the plug, but do your best. Lifting the ground or using a separate ground should only be done as a last resort.

While we are talking about electrical things, how about your washrooms or kitchen? Are there outlets located near water fixtures? If so, do they have GFI (ground fault interrupter) outlets? These things are a miracle of modern electronics that act a bit like a fuse, but under special circumstances. If more than a few micro amperes of current flows through the ground, the circuit is interrupted. If something that is plugged into one of these outlets should happen to fall into water, current will flow through the ground and the circuit is interrupted. If you don't have them, they can easily be installed. Any good hardware store has them, and they go in place of the normal outlet. If you have more than one outlet on the same circuit, they can all work off the same GFI. Check with your local hardware store or a good electrician.

While you are talking with your electrician, you may want to have him check your circuit breakers or fuses to make sure they are all working properly. Circuit breakers can deteriorate with age. I have seen them trip too easily, or not trip, except on a very large overload. A good check

every five years or so is money well spent. Your electrician can also check your installation to make sure everything adheres to local codes. The electrical codes are there for your protection. There is often a great temptation to make changes without a permit or inspection, but this can come back to haunt you. In the case of any problems, having evidence that everything is up to code can save you a lot of headaches.

A few minutes of time can pay great dividends in a safer radio station. Just start by taking a walk through the station with your eyes open and a notepad. Just write down anything that catches your eye, whether you're sure it is a problem or not. After you make your list, sit down and go over it carefully. Take one item at a time and check them out thoroughly. Don't move on until you take care of the current item, or have to put it on hold. As you check items off your list, you will learn a lot. After you have finished checking things off your list, do another walk through. You will probably catch a few things you missed the first time.

Most of the items you will find, will not take a lot of time or money to correct. If the manager thinks you're wasting your time, just show him your list and ask him how much it would cost the station if just one of those items on the list would become a problem. Could you have a fire? How about an injury and the resultant hospital bills, sick leave, and possible lawsuit? The few dollars you spend on your inspection can save thousands. Good luck and good hunting!

Subscribe to:

Radio Guide

Subscriptions are \$12⁰⁰ per year.

Send a check with your order,

We will invoice you, if needed.

Just fax your order to 507-280-9143

Radio Guide

511 18th Street SE, Rochester, MN 55904
Phone 507-280-9668 Fax 507-2809143