

FCC Cites Florida Utility for Interference to Radio Amateur



ARRL EMC Engineer Mike Gruber, W1MG, demonstrates one technique for pinpointing power line noise.

NEWINGTON, CT, Jun 8, 2006--The FCC has issued a [*Citation*](#) to Lakeland Electric, a municipally owned utility in Lakeland, Florida, for violating Part 15 rules by interfering with a local radio amateur. §15.5(c) of the FCC rules requires that the operator of an "incidental radiator" must cease operating the device after an FCC representative notifies the operator that the device is causing harmful interference. The "incidental radiator" in this case is overhead power lines. Under an agreement, the ARRL and the FCC cooperate in resolving cases of line noise interference to Amateur Radio licensees.

"Power line noise continues to generate the bulk of interference complaints that ARRL receives," says ARRL Electromagnetic Compatibility Engineer Mike Gruber, W1MG, who says the League reviews hundreds of such complaints each year. About half of them are resolved promptly by the utilities, in some instances with assistance from the ARRL Laboratory. Gruber says he believes this is the first time the FCC has issued a *Citation* to a utility in a case involving power line interference to ham radio.

The radio amateur involved, J. C. Flynn, W4FGC, told ARRL that Lakeland Electric has been good about fixing routine problems, but he doesn't think the utility personnel know how to resolve cases of power line noise. "I have been 10 years trying to get something done," he said, adding that the noise affects all HF bands. "It is *terrible!*"

Flynn first noticed the power line noise around 1995. Subsequent complaints, assurances from the utility that it was addressing the problem--or that it couldn't find one--and even some FCC warnings followed before the FCC issued its *Citation* to Lakeland Electric on May 16. Flynn, who's now 84, told the League that as of June 7, nothing had been done to fix the severe line noise at his location, which he demonstrated over the telephone on several bands. He said he especially enjoys getting on 40 meter SSB with a large roundtable of friends.

Commented Gruber: "There has been no activity by the utility in resolving this problem in over a year, and Mr Flynn's noise case now appears to be at a standstill." The League's involvement in the case goes back to January 2001, when Flynn requested the League's assistance. Gruber says the League's role is to provide technical information and guidance to utilities "to keep a complaint from reaching the point of a *Citation*."



J. C. Flynn, W4FGC, says he's been plagued by power line noise for more than 10 years.



FCC Part 15 rules classify most power lines and related equipment as "incidental radiators" and prohibit harmful interference to licensed services.

In late 2005, Gruber had a chance to check the line noise at Flynn's QTH firsthand. He had taken RFI gear to a Florida ham radio convention for a talk and demonstration. Afterward, on his own time, Gruber--with help from ARRL West Central Florida Section Manager Dee Turner, N4GD--took some noise measurements of his own. "Since I was on vacation, this afforded me an opportunity for a closer look at this longstanding interference situation," Gruber said.

Gruber submitted the results of his on-site inspection to the FCC. Personnel from the Commission's Tampa field office followed up with their own inspection before issuing the *Citation*, which lays the groundwork for a possible *Notice of Apparent Liability* proposing to fine the utility if the interference problem is not resolved.

"I hope this case serves as a precedent for FCC enforcement, where appropriate, in power line noise cases," said Gruber, who's compiled various reports and correspondence relating to the Lakeland Electric power line interference case into a booklet of approximately 60 pages. "While the League will work with amateurs in such cases for as long as it takes," he added, "we hope the FCC *Citation* will serve as a warning to electric utilities that it's not acceptable to take months or years to fix the problem causing the interference."