

WOBC Slapped with \$1,000 Fine

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In a Nov. 7 order from the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C., Oberlin College's popular student-run radio station WOBC-FM was charged with a \$1,000 fine for "willful and repeated...failure to maintain operational Emergency Alert System equipment."

According to the FCC, the equipment "is designed to provide the President with a means to address the American people in the event of a [local or] national emergency." David Solomon, Chief of the FCC's Enforcement Bureau, said, "...The Rules [require] broadcast stations to install and maintain operational EAS equipment, so that monitoring and transmitting functions are available during times when the station is in operation."

On March 12 of this year, however, an agent from the FCC's Detroit office paid an unexpected visit to the network and discovered WOBC was not only out of compliance with the Federal Commission's regulations, but had not maintained working EAS equipment in the station office since at least New Year's of 2001.

Senior Neil Freeman, WOBC's current station manager, blamed the network's high rate of turnover for the problem.

"[The system] wasn't functional because, at some point in the '90s, there was a breakdown in communication between station leadership from year to year," he said. "If you have new people every three or four years, then you can't really preserve any of the knowledge that you learn."

WOBC was originally fined a much greater sum of \$8,000 on May 23, which it then appealed, claiming that the network could not afford such a large fine.

According to Freeman, the summer station manager, senior Michael Gallope, along with the help of the station's faculty advisor Tom Lopez, sent in documents attesting to the station's fiscal situation for the past several years and pointing out that the station had, since the inspection, installed the necessary equipment so as to comply with regulations.

As a result of the appeal, the original charge was then reduced to \$1,000. Yet according to Freeman, this figure is still too great a price to pay. WOBC's annual budget is less than \$20,000 per year, covering the salaries of four student staff members and a monthly retainer for a professional engineer, as well as licensing fees and equipment upgrades. The station plans to request the necessary funds from Student Finance's Ad-Hoc Committee, Freeman said.

He also suggested that in the future WOBC will do its best to make certain that a similar violation does not occur.

"We're trying our best to keep the station as together as possible and to improve continuity between years," Freeman said.

Yet he seemed to shy away from taking full responsibility for the legal breach.

"When an organization is in disarray, and a lot of things need to be fixed, then it is easier to focus on non-technical things like energizing membership, the physical organization of the station and getting people involved, rather than the technical things like FCC compliance," he said.

"We're all just college students, too. It's impossible to be an expert on something you only entered into a few years ago," he added.

WOBC has 30 days from the order's release date on Nov. 7 to either pay the full amount demanded or to request permission to pay under an installment plan. Otherwise, the case will be sent on to the Department of Justice.