



FCC unplugs pirate radio in Portland

Local music - The broadcasters are shut down for operating without a license

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Portland “pirate” radio station 96.7 FM is off the air.

Portland Radio Authority was shut down by an agent from the Federal Communications Commission late Wednesday afternoon, according to a message left for The Oregonian by Gus Elg, PRA engineer. PRA had been broadcasting for 3 1/2 years without an FCC license, more than a year from a downtown studio. Prior to that, the station’s microwatt signal emanated from the “mudroom in a home in Southeast Portland,” station manager Brian Riehle, 29, said earlier.

Section 301 of the Communications Act states that “to use or operate any apparatus for the transmission of . . . signals by radio” requires an FCC license. PRA’s transmitter, built by Elg, had been nicknamed “Frankenstein.”

PRA also broadcast an online stream of its programming, which was legal, but the FCC halted this as well, and it still was off as of Thursday night.

The station’s online programming was gaining momentum in Portland local music and arts scenes, as much of its commercial-free airtime was allotted to playing Portland bands. Some of PRA’s 75-member all-volunteer disc jockey staff had been doing outreach beyond the studio. The North Williams Avenue restaurant Pix Patisserie hosted a weekly show, and the Portland Arts Center was home to a PRA-broadcast listening party last month.

Prior to the shutdown, Riehle said he was “sure the FCC knows about us but is letting us do our thing,” as PRA did not take an “activist” stand on pirate broadcasting.

Without going into specifics of PRA’s case, a spokesperson from the FCC’s Enforcement Bureau in Washington D.C. said actions taken against pirate radio stations can vary from a verbal request to shut down, to an “in rem seizure,” in which the FCC in conjunction with marshals from the U.S. Department of Justice confiscate broadcast equipment.

Elg, 26, attributed the FCC interest to a profile of the station, which appeared Feb. 24 in The Oregonian’s A&E section, but he could not be reached for further comment.