

SPARK NEWS

News, analysis and opinion about
noncommercial media and radio broadcasting
by Ken Mills. © 2018 Ken Mills Agency, LLC

MONDAY, JUNE 25, 2018

BOGUS CARRIAGE LIST CAUSES CONCERNS ABOUT THE IMPROPER USE OF STATION CALL LETTERS



It started on Wednesday (6/20/18) when Lucy from WSKR-LP 95.5 FM – *Spin Maker Radio* – in Jacksonville, posted the following message on the College Broadcasters bulletin board [\[link\]](#):

Hey everyone, I received an EarthDate CD in the mail. I was wondering if anyone else has received this and if you liked/aired the episodes?

[Note: The names have been changed to protect privacy. Comments have been edited for brevity and clarity.]

Lucy's post was followed by a post from Sarah at KALX in Berkeley:

I also received this CD in the mail yesterday. I was skeptical about the sponsor of the program, the "Bureau of Economic Geology." So I did a deep dive. The "Bureau of Economic Geology" is a department at UT in Austin.

EarthDate is bought and paid for by a company called Schlumberger who describe themselves as "the world's leading provider of technology for drilling and processing oil and gas." On Schlumberger's website I saw in a press release that said EarthDate is on 300 stations including KALX. How ever, this program is not on KALX.

Concern about the veracity of EarthDate then migrated to another list, PubRadio [\[link\]](#). Alex from a large NPR News/Talk station wrote:

I thought other NPR news stations would want to know they might be on EarthDate's affiliate list. I saw several NPR affiliates listed. I'd be surprised if any of them would air any short-form modules, much less one funded by the oil and gas industry.

Similar posts continued to appear on both lists. By midday Friday (6/22) over 40 stations from New York to Minnesota to San Francisco had complained about being on the carriage list of a program that was not on their station.

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Spark News decided to investigate.

WHY HONEST CARRIAGE LISTS MATTER

We've worked in national radio programming syndication for over 30 years. When a station is listed as carrying a program it is an implied endorsement of the program.

If a carriage list isn't truthful, it is hard to believe any of the producers other claims. If program in distribution comes to us for our services the first thing we do is confirm the carriage list.

Producers and program marketers inflate carriage several ways. The most common method is to list every translator, cable system and website on which the program could possibly be heard. This technique can make a program that is actually carried on only a couple of dozen stations appear like it is on in hundreds of places.

Of course, every nationally syndicated program occasionally has errors or dated references on carriage lists. This is to be expected because sometimes stations don't notify programs when they change their schedule.

EarthDate is different because it appears to be willful systematic misrepresentation.

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE EARTHDAT CARRIAGE LIST

We sent emails to folks listed on the EarthDate website [\[link\]](#) and asked about the discrepancies.

Within minutes after sending the email we received a phone call from Casey Walker, the Marketing Manager for EarthDate.

Walker told us he had been "blindsided" by the station complaints and our intention to publicize the situation on Spark News. Walker, who said he also represents other radio programs produced at the University of Texas, told us he does mass-mailings of promotional CDs to stations. If a station doesn't respond to the mailing, Walker said he assumes the station is carrying the program. In other words, Walker's mailing list becomes his carriage list.



Casey Walker

Our conversation with Walker continued:

Spark News: Does this mean if someone at a station throws a CD from you in the trash, you put the station on the carriage list anyway?

Walker: Yes, because the station probably aired other programs I have represented in the past.

Spark News: Why don't you contact the stations and find out if they are actually airing the program?

Walker: {silence} We don't have time to contact them. Our system has always worked in the past.

Spark News: Do you realize that your sponsor, Shlumberger, claims to shareholders that EarthDate is heard on 300 stations?

Walker: They get the list from us.

Spark News: Are you aware that a made-up carriage list is probably the worst thing a national program syndicator can do? That it destroys all trust?

Walker: I guess I am aware of it now. What should I do?

Spark News: Take the EarthDate carriage list off the website now and don't post another one until you are certain it is accurate.

Walker immediately took the carriage list off the website.

Though the list is no longer available, Walker forgot to remove the colorful map (on the left) that shows alleged EarthDate affiliates across the country.

TODAY'S POST

LEONARD LOPATE
RESURFACES IN
NEW YORK AT
WBAI • KHSU
COMMUNITY
BOARD SAYS
"FIRE PETER
FRETWELL"

BLOG ARCHIVE

BLOG ARCHIVE

SPARK NEWS LINKS

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NOW

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FOLLOWER
S

FOLLOW BY EMAIL

Email address...

Submit

Station locations across the U.S.:



EarthDate station locations nationwide; yellow indicates recent additions.

This incident is important because people support public media because they feel they can trust it. If that trust is gone, it hurts all of us in the industry.

Posted by Ken Mills Agency, LLC at [12:00 AM](#)



3 comments:



Steve Robinson June 25, 2018 at 5:41 AM

You are spot on about the way a carriage list can be inflated by putting in every translator, repeater and set of false teeth that receive the signal with no explanation about the differences. When I became manager of the WFMT Radio Network in 2002 the first I did was to separate out the "main channel" stations, as I called them, from the repeaters and translators and I made sure anyone getting the Network's carriage lists knew the distinction. The notion that someone would send a CD to a station and not hearing back assume that station is taking the program is reprehensible and I'm sure everyone thanks you for tracking this down and putting a stop to it.

[Reply](#)



Tony Krabill June 25, 2018 at 6:45 AM

"If a station doesn't respond to the mailing, Walker said he assumes the station is carrying the program." Seriously?!

[Reply](#)



Mike Saffran June 25, 2018 at 11:25 AM

Great investigative piece, Ken! I'm sure CBI members, especially, are appreciative (as it's highly informative – and educational for all, clearly including the show's producer). Incidentally, I think the situation of 'false carriage,' as described with "EarthDate," is also fairly common in the record-promotion world. We (and other stations, I'm sure) occasionally receive "thanks" from artists/bands for playing their music ... even when we're not airing it. I can only guess that a record promoter who merely sent us the music told the bands we're playing it ... with the same result: 'Implied endorsement ... willful misrepresentation ... destroyed trust.' Conversely, the good promoters (and there are many of them, too) don't do that.

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