

PLC is short for Power Line Communications a new way to provide broadband internet over the existing power lines. Unfortunately, it also has the potential to render wide swaths of HF spectrum useless due to RFI. It poses perhaps more of a threat to the future of ham radio communications than any other in recent memory. Basically, it superimposes a broadband (up to 80 MHz) signal along side the standard 60 Hz power line signal. Now think about it... how many times have you looked up thought "If I could only use the power company's line as an antenna" and you can see the possibilities that emerge. Antennas that are miles long, mounted high in the air, radiating RF all the way up to 80 MHz. Not a fun possibility for ham operators, is it?

One would think that other users of the HF spectrum (the US government in particular) would object to such interference and that saner heads would prevail. However, in a recent ARRL article it was reported:

"The FCC has declared BPL [FCC shorthand for PLC] as a top priority for its Office of Engineering and Technology (OET) in 2003. [Michael] Powell, who recently witnessed a BPL demonstration, calls its potential "immense." As the [FCC] chairman sees it, BPL "can offer consumers freedom to access broadband services from any room in their home without need to pay for additional wiring, by simply plugging an adapter into an existing electrical outlet."

Currently, the FCC is investigating the feasibility of PLC in the US, but the aforementioned quote leads one to believe the FCC is more attuned to the PLC companies than they are to the incumbent users of the spectrum. In Japan, where PLC systems have been in operation, amateurs complained so much about the RFI that the PLC companies were forced to place 30 dB notches in the PLC frequencies to protect the amateur allocations. Perhaps this is an avenue that bears investigation in the US. When (and if) a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking is issued by the FCC, I would urge all amateurs on HF to make their voices heard... before ours are silenced by PLC. i urge the fcc to reconsider this idea.