

Comcast Must Do Better on Local News to Meet Merger Promises

WASHINGTON -- A new Free Press report released in May reveals deep disparities between the amount of local news offered on Comcast's English- and Spanish-language stations.

To justify its takeover of NBC Universal, Comcast committed to increasing local programming across its newly acquired NBC and Telemundo stations for a period of five years. The Federal Communications Commission requires Comcast to file quarterly localism reports for each of the 25 stations to ensure that the company follows through on its promise.

“No News Is Bad News: An Analysis of Comcast-NBC Universal Compliance with FCC Localism Conditions” examines the first filings submitted since the cable giant took over NBC in January. It offers the first glimpse of Comcast’s compliance with a merger condition required by the FCC that seeks to increase local news programming at Telemundo and NBC stations owned and operated by Comcast. Read the full report

here: http://www.freepress.net/files/No_News_Is_Bad_News.pdf

“The report shows how media consolidation and empty commitments hurt local communities,” said Free Press Policy Counsel **Corie Wright**. “NBC Universal bought Telemundo back in 2002, pledging to increase local news for Spanish-speaking audiences. But it did just the opposite and cut local jobs and journalism. The current local news numbers for Telemundo stations reflect those broken NBC Universal promises.

“Comcast has an opportunity to compensate Telemundo audiences for years of diminished service – but it has a long way to go. We intend to hold Comcast accountable for its local news commitment and make sure that history isn’t repeated this time around.”

Key findings of the Free Press report:

- Comcast has committed to increasing local news production in only six of the 15 communities served by its Telemundo owned-and-operated stations (O&Os).

- While local news and public affairs programming represents less than 20 percent of weekly programming time for NBC O&Os, it represents less than 3 percent of weekly programming time for most Telemundo O&Os.

- NBC stations average about four hours and 42 minutes per day of local news. Telemundo stations on average air only 48 minutes per day of local news.
- In Los Angeles, the NBC station provides nearly four hours per day of local news. The local Telemundo station serving Los Angeles provided less than one hour.
- In New York, the NBC station provided close to six hours per day of local programming. The local Telemundo station only provided an average of 30 minutes per day.
- Telemundo stations in Boston and Denver aired no local news or information programming between January and April 2011.

The report also finds that Comcast failed to properly report to the FCC on its programming, obscuring the true nature and amount of programming being claimed as local news.

- Comcast failed to include any descriptions of the programs listed in its localism filings. Without these descriptions, it is difficult for the public and the FCC to determine with any accuracy whether the programming listed actually meets the merger commitment.
- More than 1,000 hours that Comcast claimed as local news programming were actually commercials aired during broadcasts.

On Monday, Comcast announced plans to increase local programming for its NBC stations in Dallas, Miami and California. No local programming increases have been announced yet for Telemundo stations. Free Press is calling on Comcast to commit to significantly improving local news production and distribution across all Telemundo stations that it controls.

“All communities deserve better local news programming,” Wright said. “We challenge Comcast to go above and beyond its merger commitment and provide Spanish-speaking audiences with the local news programming they need and deserve.”