ACUTA eNews October 1988, Vol. 17, No. 10
Greetings from ACUTA’s administrative office in Lexington, KY. Although we are still in our temporary office "just across the street", we are now using our new permanent address, Lexington Financial Center, Suite 1810, Lexington, KY 40507, thanks to our friendly and courteous mailman.

In establishing ACUTA’s new office, special recognition should go to President Bill D. Morris and ACUTA Board of Directors for their unanimous support, cooperation and, most assuredly, their patience. Our acknowledgement must also include Dr. Kia Malott, our immediate past president, who was responsible for making it all possible during his term of office. As a note of interest ACUTA was incorporated in the state of Kentucky (see the President’s message).

In selecting Lexington as our home office, ACUTA joined thirty-one other national associations that have made the beautiful bluegrass country their home. Several of them are connected to the ever popular horse industry. Other well known organizations, such as Council of State Governments, National Tour Association, Center for Law and Justice, National Association of State Executives, National Association of State Training and Development and National Association of State Purchasers. Officials are among those that have selected the area because of its accessibility, developmental space, mild climate, and natural beauty. Lexington’s Metropolitan Statistical Area population is approximately 345,000 with the year 2000 projection of 400,000.

Now, a little bit about our new office in the Lexington Financial Center, which we should be relocated to by Thanksgiving. Furniture and computer equipment are on order. The combination of professional office space and the latest in office technology will escalate ACUTA to the same stature as other professional associations in the college and university environment as well as our contemporary organizations in the rapidly growing telecommunications field.

But back to why we’re here. Our responsibilities and duties are many and varied. In a future column (which we will have each month) I will list those responsibilities so that you can better understand our role and be able to use our services as efficiently as possible. Probably the most visible functions to you, the reader, that we will be performing immediately, are general planning and logistical

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the writers and are not necessarily the opinion of their institution or company. ACUTA as an association does not express an opinion or endorse products or services.
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
—Bill D. Morris, University of Central Florida

Our Fall Seminar was a great success. The Ohio State University Telecommunications staff made very professional presentations. Each is to be congratulated. I know that they prepared for many days - it showed. The comment I heard most was, "These people really know what they are talking about."

I'm sure that the 150 who were in Columbus share in thanking Dino and his staff for this fine educational program and for the varied cultural experiences. For those who were not there, these ran the gamut from Octoberfest with a traditional band, presentations by a string quartet and a tour of the historic Ohio Theatre and a short presentation on the theatre's organ.

Our concurrent "Understanding Telecommunications" workshop has twenty new graduates. Ruth and Coley continued the tradition of outstanding presentations.

I have had NACUBO send each of the college and university members a notice of their Unrelated Business Income Seminar. I felt that you should be aware of the implications of possible change. We will have a summary of this meeting in a future newsletter.

I also granted Payphone Magazine permission to offer each ACUTA member a free year's subscription to their magazine. They will contact you. It is your option to accept or decline their offer.

Our Winter Seminar will expand our knowledge on the two most important, and most difficult to control segments of telecommunications. These are people and finances. I'm sure we can all use help in these areas. I hope you are planning to attend this session in Palm Springs, California. You will be receiving the registration information in early November.

F. William Orrick has been temporarily re-appointed Finance Chair. Please contact Bill on all ACUTA financial matters.

As I previously reported, ACUTA has established its administrative offices in Lexington, Kentucky. At the same time, we investigated becoming a nonprofit Kentucky corporation. Since its beginning ACUTA has been just what its name indicated: an association -- an affiliation of many people with common professional interests. ACUTA was not organized to be a profit-making business, so members may wonder why we elected to become a corporation.

The principal reason is protection. Members and officers of nonprofit corporations are not usually considered to be responsible for the obligations and liabilities of the corporation. The legal separation of responsibilities between an association and its members is not so clear. For example, ACUTA incorporated has been able to sign a lease for its office space in its own name, and our officers and members do not have to be personally responsible for the rental payments.

Another point: members of ACUTA may come and go, but the organization must continue. A nonprofit corporation is considered to be a citizen in its own right with perpetual life, with all of the authority and position of any commercial enterprise, and with no need to demonstrate the specific consent of all members for it to conduct its daily business. (Major policy decisions, of course, still belong to the directors and/or the members under the charter and bylaws.)

A corporation, even a nonprofit one, has to observe certain formalities and procedures in order to maintain its separate existence. It must have a board of directors; it must have meetings. Initially the present Constitution and Bylaws will conform with corporate law. ACUTA has already developed a sufficient organizational structure, so any additional costs of compliance with corporate legal requirements should be minimal. These costs should be more than offset by the legal protections which ACUTA's members will gain.

ADMIN. DIRECTOR, Continued:

support for all future events, industry liaison for the sponsorship and exhibit program, and registration for all seminars and conferences beginning with Palm Springs in January 1989.

Most important of all though is that Kellie, my Administrative Assistant, and I are here to serve you and assist you in any way possible. If you cannot remember our telephone number on the front page, just remember 606-25ACUTA. Our Fax number is 606-252-5673 and our bitnet is ACUTABUKCC.

ACUTA

WINTER 1989 SEMINAR
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What an exciting and busy Fall I have had so far! First of all I have been privileged to meet so many of you while conducting the ACUTA seminars "Understanding Telecommunications". We have presented this program in Columbus, Ohio, St. Paul, Minnesota, Syracuse, NY and held a full-day session during the annual conference in San Diego. We have two more seminars scheduled this year—one in Pomona, California and one in Millersville, PA. We look forward to seeing some of you at one of these sessions.

In Columbus, Ohio, the workshop was conducted by Coley Burton and myself. It was held at the same time as the Fall Seminar conducted by the Telecommunications Department at Ohio State University.

The Fall Seminar was a big success, and from everything I heard from the attendees, the telecom staff who conducted the seminar sessions really knew their stuff. What a class act!

I was treated to a tour of their facilities by Dino Pezzutti. They certainly have the perfect facility to house their switch and staff. Not only is it highly functional and spacious, but it is very attractive. The Ohio State staff were most gracious and made all of us feel right at home. We were treated to a tour of the Ohio Theatre, an old theatre that has been restored to its original glory. Hard to believe such beauty and attention to details, especially where it involved the comfort of their patrons, ever existed. We were told that it was scheduled to be torn down, but a group of concerned citizens stopped the process, raised funds for the restoration and went on an old time scavenger hunt, so to speak, to locate and put back many of the original furnishings and paintings. Anyway—great job Ohio State, THANKS!

At St. Paul, we had competition from the MTA annual conference being held on the same days in Minneapolis. Our attendees at the workshop were still in number, but were quite interested in the program in a big way. They asked so many good questions. Howard Lowell of Colorado was host and co-presenter of the workshop. I took the time to drive to St. Paul and enjoyed the lovely fall colors.

Linda Bogden-Stubbs hosted the program in Syracuse for Jim Shea, our Region 1 Director. Once again, the participants were eager to learn; asking many questions. Both Pat Paul and Linda were most helpful during the sessions, providing a different point of view and information when asked. Pat is the Membership Chair for ACUTA and was representing the ACUTA Board at this workshop. The Fall colors were really in full bloom in Syracuse—great scenery!

But, believe it or not, I have been busy at home this Fall too. We implemented the "station discrete" authorization codes for our student telephone services operation this fall. It was quite an experience. We also had our software vendor (Telecommunications Software, Inc.) develop a new program for the student operation, that essentially moves the program from a mainframe-based operation to a PC-based operation. Doing all of this at the same time was a lot of work, but successful. The students like their "enhanced student Auth Card"; my staff are happy about eliminating the old room-mate hassles; and we all like the new PC-based software. However, when we were working around the clock getting all the data entered within a short time-frame, we all were wishing we had left well enough alone!

Our focus now is on next academic year—and we are researching ways to automate the data entry process (inputting the student's name, address, telephone number, auth code, etc.). I know there has to be a better way.

As most of you know, we installed a new Voice Messaging/Voice Processing system, replacing our old Voice Mail system. It has been a lot of work training our users on the new system and finding specific areas where enhanced voice processing applications will solve a problem or fit a need. Our efforts in this area has been almost too successful as we find ourselves with a multitude of potential applications and a concern that we might end up with a processing problem. Our main objective is to provide voice mail service to faculty, staff and students and we don’t want any degradation of their service. It is not a major issue, but something we felt the need to be aware of, especially as the enhanced call processing applications grow.

While on the subject of Voice Mail, there are a couple of articles in the October issue of PROCOMM on voice mail. One is by John True, the Director of Computing and Communications at SFSCU, CA., and the second article is by Kyra Gottesman. John True's article includes some advice and tips on voice messaging at colleges and universities (especially helpful were the tips on university politics).

OCTEL has an excellent newsletter and their latest issue has some tips on etiquette when using voice mail. Here's a few of the tips:
1) Identify yourself on each message
2) One subject per message please
3) Provide details, ask the question
4) Organize your thoughts
5) Respond to messages promptly
6) Don’t hide behind the system
7) Update your greeting
8) Watch storage space—don’t waste it

I have a friend who is responsible for a very large telecommunications system and his major pet peeve with voice mail is the abuse of item number 6—don’t hide behind the system. He feels too many people simply use voice mail to avoid answering the telephone anytime!

For myself, the biggest problem I have deals with callers who merely ask you to call them back—no hint as to what is wanted. I have tried many ways to get them to ask the question rather than ask me to call them back, but most of the time, I still get a simple "call me" message.

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PARTY LINE, Continued:

Did you read where the University of Mass. selected ERICSSON Information Systems to provide students, administration and faculty with 34,000 lines of integrated voice and data. According to the October issue of COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT magazine, the consultant was Fred Chanowski of TMC Corp., and the system will include the Boston, Amherst and Worcester campuses. Price tag of around $29.5 million according to the article.

And speaking of our friend, Fred Chanowski, I received an announcement of their brand new "Junior Consultant"--a baby boy for the Chanowski's, named Ross. Congratulations!

The University of Arizona selected the #5ESS switch from AT&T. I understand it involves advanced networking capabilities, ISDN and other goodies.

And while at Syracuse, I learned that Linda Bogden-Stubb's has reached a decision on their switch bid, but since it is still pending final approval, she wouldn't reveal the choice.

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And for some exciting news about ISDN. Northern Telecom implemented ISDN primary rate access by connecting a customer-owned Meridian SL1 PBX in Omaha, NE with AT&T Network Services.

WATS Marketing of America will use primary rate access to shorten call processing time and provide calling line identification and call routing to its agents or operators.

Their PBX is a 780-line SL1XST, which is linked to an AT&T network serving office equipped to support ISDN primary rate and AT&T's Megacom 800 service. Two primary rate spans were installed as an additional capability to ongoing service by inserting two primary rate interface circuit packs and two D-channel handler interfaces in standard card slots; new software, X-11, rel 12, was installed on the switch. At least it is a start!

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Still a debate going on about the 60 cent increase for Subscriber Line Charge scheduled for Dec 1, 1988. Supposedly, at the same time, the terminating premium Carrier Common Line Charge will decrease, going from the current 4.14 cents per minute to 3.39 cents per minute. The reduction is due to projected SLC revenues (the added 60 cents), and the stimulation of long distance usage resulting from the anticipated lowered long distance rates.

If the FCC lets the SLC (subscriber line charge) increase take effect as scheduled, it will bring the SLC rate up to $3.20 Dec 1st., and then on April 1, 1989, it goes to $3.50 per month. The National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) has proposed that the FCC eliminate the last two scheduled increases because the predicted rampant bypassing of the local network hasn't materialized, thus removing a major motivation for shifting the costs onto the consumers. The debate by Federal-State Joint Board members is whether to put the issue to a vote or simply allow the increase to happen as scheduled.

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This issue of ACUTA News is the first one to be printed in Lexington, Kentucky. They have replaced the Nebraska "RED" with the ACUTA "BLUE"..... It will still be edited by me and we will forward the copy to our new headquarters where it will be printed and mailed to our members. Please have patience, as you know it always takes a little time to work out all the bugs when a change happens. If you have some news to share with your fellow ACUTA members, please send it to me and we will see that it gets included in the newsletter. Most of you are doing some mighty interesting things---please share your information.

The brochures for the Winter Seminar were mailed to all members. I promises to be a top-notch program in an ideal location (especially if you live in the northern states). Get your registration in early, you won't want to miss this seminar. Contact the ACUTA Office in Lexington if you didn't receive your brochure.

See you next month!
Central Florida Higher Education User Group:  
......Bill Morris, UCF

Southern Bell hosted the CFHE group in Orlando on Sept 20th. Representatives from the telecommunications and computer departments of nine local higher education institutions attended.

The meeting included information on Regulatory Issues, Major Account Center Review, Review of the Combined Sales Forces, Technological Directions, Advanced Systems Products Overview, ISDN, Touch Star Service, and Open Network Architecture. Speakers included Dan Wilson, Roger Strickland, George Wenteler, Dick Spear and Joe Mendoza.

It was interesting to learn that Central Florida will be one of the first ISDN service sites. To facilitate this, Southern Bell has installed over 160,000 miles of fiber with more than 9,600 miles installed in Orlando.

If you haven’t had at least one annual planning/informational meeting with your local operating company, I urge you to press them to start. It is always nice to know what your LOC is planning for 1990-1991 and 1992.

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Jeff Kuhn, chair of the DMS-100 CENTREX User Group reports the 2nd meeting will be held in New Orleans, LA., January 23 thru 25, 1989. It will focus on the opportunity for CENTREX users to share experiences and concerns in a session closed to Northern Telecom and the telcos. A Roundtable Discussion is planned where users and Northern Telecom executives will address questions and concerns common to all.

For more information, contact:  
DMS-100 CENTREX User Group Steering Committee  
Northern Telecom, Dept. 3214  
P O Box 13010  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709

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The National CENTREX User Group meeting was held in Houston, Texas. Of major interest to the attendees was a survey conducted by NCUG on user’s views of CENTREX. They asked the users to rate the service and the providers. A majority of respondents said they were satisfied with their CENTREX providers, but somewhat less than satisfied about the service itself and such items as support and training. In the area of customer service, 17% said it was excellent and 43% said it was good. However some 40% said service provided by the Bell operating companies fell between fair and bad.

Some negative responses included the difference in capabilities offered larger customers and smaller customers by the BOCs. For example, the on-premises terminals to monitor system performance and perform station moves, adds and changes. Not available to the small customer.

One respondent said CENTREX users need support people that understand the capabilities of the service.

Jim Shea was in attendance at the CENTREX User Group Meeting. Jim is our Region 1 Director and he has promised to send me more information on the meeting.

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The USER GROUP column is new to ACUTA News and it needs your support and information to keep it going. Please let us know what is happening out there in the various user groups. We know how popular and helpful these groups are. They are very well attended at the ACUTA Annual Conference---help us keep all of you informed!

Ohio University
J. Warren McClure School of Communication Systems Management
Radio TV Communication Building
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Athens, Ohio 45701-2979
614-593-4890 FAX

November, 1988

Dear ACUTA Colleagues:

Re: Accolades to Del Combs & Bill Morris

This is to especially thank our dear friends Del Combs and Bill Morris for the fine support they provided to our students at the recent ACUTA Columbus, Ohio Regional campus. Kudos to ACUTA for having such caring people as Bill and Del whose efforts in fostering student participation can enhance the integrity and professionalism of this organization.

Thanks to their efforts -- and through cooperation of five of the vendors who exhibited (GTE, Ameritech, Equinox, Tele-Duct and Anixter), eleven of our students were exposed to these vendor presentations. What a terrific opportunity for these aspiring telecom professionals -- to integrate their academic experience with 'real-life' vendor product demos. (For those of you who don't know, we at OU offer an undergraduate degree in Communication Systems Management. Our School is contained within the College of Communications and offers an interdisciplinary curriculum -- in addition to our industry-specific voice/data/regulatory and technical courses.)

It was also great seeing so many of my ACUTA friends at the Tuesday night gathering.

Looking forward to staying in touch, I remain,

Very truly yours,

Jacqueline Anne Larsen
Assistant Professor

JAL:sk
THE SIMPLE THINGS

One of the most time saving items we purchased was a Polaroid camera and plenty of film. The instant picture capability save both the University and IBM project teams hours of running around inspecting various areas of the installation. By bringing pictures to meetings and using them as documentation of problems and difficult installation areas we were better able to communicate and be effective as to what had to be done to correct or fix a situation. The pictures were also an effect way of documenting problems for future reference. The phrase "a picture is worth a 1,000 words" was never as true as it was for our installation. The instant camera became a vital piece of the installation equipment.

When printing out lengthy computer reports, do it on carbonless NCR type computer paper so that you have built in copies. This type of paper may be a bit more expensive, but you will save yourself many hours of printing reports over and over when someone else needs a copy. RULE: Someone else always needs a copy when you have not made one. Make sure your vendor uses the same approach, they will never make enough copies either.

There is nothing worse or more frustrating then trying to read a dot matrix printout that was produced with a poor ribbon. Make sure you have a generous supply of printer ribbons along with your vendor, and change them as often as necessary.

You will very likely want to receive copies of all documents generated by your vendor that go to anyone else in your organization. To facilitate this, you will have to constantly remind your vendor to copy you on all communications to your organization, regardless of who they are sending it to. They will not remember, they will forget, you will have to constantly remind them. One thing we did to help facilitate the distribution of project related mail was to set up two central mail boxes. One each for University and vendor mail and correspondence. It was a little easier to keep track of incoming and outgoing mail this way.

Your telecommunications project will more than likely last 12 months or more. During this time staff will come and go, be added and changed. You'll save yourself and your vendor a lot of time if you establish a "Master Contact Telephone List". You place on this list all active members of both project teams, home telephone numbers when necessary. I would also include any FAX, Telex, voice mailbox and electronic mailbox numbers. Maintaining this list makes it easy to update and helps keep both sides in touch.

Because the project is likely to last 12 or more months, you will need to consider how you will handle vacation time for your staff and that of your vendor. I have learned one simple rule, there is never a good time to take a vacation or be away from the project.

However, it is of critical necessity for you, your staff and that of the vendor to do just that. If your project is anything like that at Columbia, you will constantly be in high gear and confronting major issues and problems daily. The pace will be very demanding and impossible to keep up for an indefinite period of time. As difficult as it is on the staff remaining, time must be scheduled for vacations.

While your system is being installed, if you can, get your vendor to install a small version of your system for your own departments use. This will allow your staff to get some advance knowledge and use of the new system while gaining some experience with the features and the new stations. This is especially true if you are contracting for some type of voice mail system or data capability. Your best bet would be to then place your entire staff on the system along with that of your vendor. This will also help facilitate communications.

If your institution has an operable electronic mail system, insist that your vendor get connected into it and becomes an active user of the system for communications to you and your staff. Electronic mail will also help facilitate documenting the project.

If your vendor can not provide a simple thing like a good clean copy of documents that you ask for, always insist on originals. If they are smart, they will get the idea. You should also be sure to let your vendor know exactly how many copies of documents you require for distribution. This will facilitate your getting them out to the proper parties with little or no lost time.

Future articles will provide many more suggestions and advise on how to get things done, areas to be avoided and frustrations which can not be avoided.

MY PERSONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Your telecommunications project will literally have hundreds, and by the time you are finished, thousand, of details for you to follow up on and keep track of. Many of you are computer users and will assume that you will use any one of many very good software packages for keeping track of these details. For some of you this may even work out very well. However, I am the type of individual that needs to have as much information with me at all times and at all meetings I attend. This would be somewhat difficult to do with a computer project management system, even if it was running on a lap top computer.

I discovered a wonderfully simple project management tool on one of my business trips. I was scanning through an airline magazine when an ad from the Executive Gallery, Inc. caught my eye. They sell a variety of project management systems. They call them "ScanCard" organizing systems. The one I use is basically a three ring binder with several pages that are cut in such a way that allows you to place about 20 pages on a page. The top of each project card is visible on the page which can then be scanned for special project notes. The system I used had four double sided pages plus, each cover of the
REGIONAL MEETING REPORTS:

ACUTA President Bill Morris sent copies of the reports of the Regional Meetings held at the annual conference in San Diego so members who were not present will be aware of the concerns expressed by the members at these meetings. He received reports from 4 of the 8 regions.

REGION 2:

Don Hoover of Villanova is Director of Region 2. It was an informal meeting with members discussing the regional survey that was distributed to all regional members attending. Understanding Telecommunications workshop will be held at Millersville University, Nov 16-18.

Discussion concerning the survey centered on the issue of wanting to have fewer industry speakers and more speakers from the regional colleges and universities. All attendees at the regional meeting felt:
A) The need for meetings at the regional level in the manner the region is pursuing now.
B) That the regional meeting at the annual conference should be held earlier in the schedule.

REGION 6:

Region 6 members felt the "Understanding Telecommunications" workshop should be designed geographically to serve Canadian needs because of the regional differences in legislation and perhaps presented by local members.

Fall Seminar in Toronto in 1989. Suggested that a Region 6 meeting should be held the day before or after seminar. Regional meetings not necessary since most region 6 members also belong to CBTA, a User Group as well as to ACUTA. They felt the annual conference as well as two or three seminars are enough.

A Region 6 newsletter may be of interest, with articles relating to Canadian universities. Suggested they write a column in the ACUTA Newsletter focused on Region 6 issues.

Consensus was that ACUTA should have the Regional Meetings at the conference on a different day and time and not just before the only "free" night.

REGION 7:

Howard Lowell of Colorado State is Director of Region 7. The issue of holding regional meetings to discuss regional topics was discussed. Idea was accepted if meeting was to cover a regional issue of over-riding importance. Holding a meeting just to "hold a meeting" was of no interest.

"Understanding Telecommunications" workshop is scheduled for St. Paul in the Fall and for Portland in the Spring.

Members expressed concern over the ACUTA Hospitality Suite, stating they prefer use of the suite be limited to ACUTA members and that vendor access be prohibited.

The members discussed the method of selecting region directors (they are appointed, not elected). They suggested that regional directors be elected at the regional meetings held in conjunction with the annual conference, that their terms be limited to three years on a staggered basis and that an incumbent be allowed to succeed themselves for one-term, if re-elected. Region 7 members agreed in principle with this idea and expects a proposal for consideration at the next annual meeting.

REGION 8:

Donna Powel of California State University at Sacramento is Director of Region 8. Major items discussed included the desire for campus workshop sessions, with emphasis on changes in the telecon field, for the purpose of bringing the membership up to speed on what's happening in this ever-changing industry. Should be one day events with speakers within their fields of expertise. Donna asked for volunteers to support and host the workshops.

"Understanding Telecommunications" workshop will be held Nov 7-9, hosted by Cal Poly-Pomona.

Leo Riley of USC provided a copy of the CPUC rate changes which informed customers of PAC-Bell that the cost of doing business is going up. PBX Trunk Lines, DID Trunking costs and private line service will be increased dramatically. In addition, there was a rate increase request submitted to CPUC on July 18, 1988 concerning the California Plan for Rate Stability.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INSTALLATION--Continued:

binder was specially cut such that you could place 24 cards on each side in addition to an 8 1/2 x 11 pad. In this manner I had a total of almost 200 cards in a simple, slim three ring binder which I carried to all meetings and made all my meeting notes in. I would use a page for each one of my project managers and vendor and used it to follow up on the assignments they had. This system drove my telecommunications vendor crazy. I never took a card out until the item was either completed or responded to by the vendor.

A computer system for tracking projects is great, but this simple system was more portable, I could take it home at night and weekends and update entries and make changes as needed. This system is not for everyone, but it allowed me to keep track of hundreds of details without them getting lost or misplaced until they were completed.

For more information you can write: The Executive Gallery, 2224 Speedball Road, Statesville, N.C. 28677-2000 or call 1-800-848-2618.

Neil S. Sachnoff, Director Information Services Support Operations, Columbia University, in the City of New York.
Users face risk from PVC wire

— Bob Brown

A growing number of experts are warning that users may be held liable for damages stemming from deaths and injuries caused by improper use of PVC-insulated inside wiring.

Billions of dollars worth of wire insulated with polyvinylchloride (PVC) was strung by telephone companies before it was learned about 10 years ago that the wire could be a hazard if improperly installed. For example, if the wire is left exposed in air-return plenums -- space above a drop ceiling that is used for ventilation -- and catches fire, dangerous fumes that can cause lung problems and poisoning can be carried throughout a building.

John Powers and Geoffrey Tritsch, principals at the telecommunications consulting firm of Powers Tritsch & Associates, Inc. in Wellesley Hills, Mass., said users could be held liable for such injuries because the wire was handled over to them by the telephone companies following the AT&T divestiture four years ago.

In light of the potential danger, users could be forced by insurance companies, fire departments or local building inspectors to remove the wire -- a process that can disrupt a user's business operations and cost thousands of dollars.

The problem is similar to the asbestos danger that has appeared in recent years, the consultants said. "If no one uncovers the asbestos, it's not a problem," Powers said. "But you've got a problem if you've got PVC wire in the air-return plenum and there is a fire. It would be unfortunate if it takes a death to get people to deal with this problem."

Many users continue to use the telephone company-installed wire, while others have abandoned it, switched to fire-resistant, teflon-coated wire, the consultants said.

"There is a time bomb up there," Powers said. "We're concerned, and so are our clients."

A major concern is determining who actually owns the wire, said Powers, whose firm plans to host a forum on the subject in the Boston area later this summer.

Several telephone companies said a grandfather clause protects them from liability for the PVC coated wire they installed before the National Fire Protection Association's National Electrical Code banned such installations in 1978.

It is unclear whether users that took over ownership of the wire would be protected by that same grandfather clause, Powers said.

"Wire passed on to users would be a user's responsibility," according to a legal spokesman for Illinois Bell Telephone Co.

Powers argues that the original wire installer would be at least partially responsible for the wire's removal.

David Weiss, a trial lawyer at the firm of Goulston & Storrs in Boston, said, "Any number of parties -- from the building occupant, to the installer, to the landlord -- could be considered responsible for wire-related problems."

Users should keep in mind that the National Electrical Code is interpreted and enforced differently from state to state and from municipality to municipality, added Frank Biskup, president of Communications Planning Corp., a Jacksonville, Florida-based consulting firm that specializes in wiring and cable. PVC-coated wire is only one of several types of wire that can fall local codes, he said.

Len Tate, the recently retired president of Northwestern University's telecommunications service, said he never considered that the exposed and abandoned PVC-coated wire at his sites could be unsafe.

"We've probably at risk as much as anyone in reusing old Bell wires," Tate said. "I'm sure we have thousands of these wires that don't meet codes. It's just not something our risk management people knew they had to look for."

Mark Robson, data communications analyst at Milton Bradley Co. in Longmeadow, Mass., said it is difficult to tell how much PVC wire has been abandoned in the duct work and in hidden places at his company's site.

"It would be a major job to clean up all that stuff," he said.

Some users have already made a point of getting rid of old wire. In fact, a spokesman for the National Fire Protection Association said that about 25% of calls these days are about the removal of unused PVC wire.

"From a legal point of view, I would assume grandfathered wire could be left there," said Neil Hennessy, associate director of communications at Reader's Digest Association, Inc. in Pleasantville, N.Y., who had PVC wire pulled at his site. "But I'm the communications director, and I don't want to have that on my conscience."

Christopher Davis, vice-president of telecommunications services at Rexnord Data Systems in Milwaukee, said his consulting group has come across many cases of unsafe wiring.

"When we put out a bid spec for a new system, we bid the system and the cabling separately," he said. "Where there is plenum, we have them pull out the old stuff. It's a little more costly, but safety comes first."

Because PVC cable is priced at about one-third the cost of flame resistant wire such as teflon-coated types, the temptation for users and contractors to continue installing it exists, said E. T. Bower, president of Bower Enterprises, Inc., a Denver based telecommunications system design firm.

"Besides that, wire lasts from 30 to 90 years -- you can never get rid of it," Bower said. "A lot of people don't see any reason to replace it."

Within the next few weeks, Powers and Tritsch plan to file a brief with the Federal Communications Commission to make it aware of this situation.