



Comcast turns off county leaders

Written by [Walt Cook, The Union Democrat](#) October 08, 2009 11:19 am

Cable T.V. giant Comcast was the subject of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors' wrath Tuesday.

Supervisors, speaking on behalf of constituents complaining of poor reception, said the company seems unconcerned about Tuolumne County.

Supervisors did temper their criticism, though, by saying the company's local support staffers have been good to work with.

Supervisor Liz Bass pointed to the fact that Comcast, the largest cable provider in the country, has declined to upgrade the county's cable system. If the company did that by December, it could extend its contract with the county by five years.

The current contract, renewed in 2006, will expire in December 2011 without the upgrade. The City of Sonora also has a franchise agreement with Comcast.

"It sort of skirts around the idea of accountability," Bass said.

According to a report from the County Administrator's Office, the Comcast's current local system is "dilapidated."

As a result, the report continues, people, especially those in higher elevations and hilly areas, "are complaining of deteriorated and lost signals. Others report loss of certain basic programming channels in the morning and then, in the late evening, the picture breaks up, freezes or breaks into little squares."

The problem "seems to have been worse with the recent transition to digital signals," the report notes.

Indeed, as explained by Comcast, the nationwide digital conversation, which went into effect this summer, has made it harder to get certain channels.

Unlike digital channels, analog channels can be viewed even when their signal is weak, though the picture may not be crisp. As digital signals get further from their source, meanwhile, they disappear or experience a "cliff effect."

Comcast has told the county that upgrading the system is high on the company's priority list and could be approved as part of the company's 2010 budget. The County Administrator's Office notes in its report that "several important hurdles still need to be overcome" before the upgrade will be formally approved.

Supervisor Paolo Maffei called Comcast's lack of action on the upgrade "disappointing."

"If we don't see some forward motion here, we have to assume they're not interested," he said.

Audience member Marguerite Johnson told supervisors she suspected the issue was a "corporate problem" and not a result of conflicts with the company's local staffers.

She added that, as a big company, "a rebuild is within their ability to accomplish."

Supervisors took no action regarding the county's agreement with Comcast at the meeting.

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