

Tough Decisions, and Why

Sounds like from comments on the reflectors I should give a little background as to what went on with the SVHFS Conference cancellation.

As with most things in our litigation riddled world today everyone wants someone to blame and compensation etcetera. The hotel is no exception. This was one of the most difficult conferences we've planned in terms of the cancellation clauses. All hotels in the area except the Holiday Inn were booked with conventions and events already as of July 2010. The Holiday Inn contract basically holds SVHFS liable, during a cancellation, for (quoting directly from the document): "100% of the estimated conference revenue" as defined "Conference revenue includes the anticipated gross revenue derived from sleeping rooms, meeting room rental fees, projected food and beverage function and ancillary enterprises if your meeting was held as scheduled." The banquet and luncheon costs would have easily been \$4,000; rooms over \$10K.

That works out to somewhere in the neighborhood of \$16,000 plus lawyer's fees which would bankrupt the SVHFS since we only have \$5K in the bank.

Fortunately we had discussed "acts of God or terrorists" during the two months of negotiations with the hotel last summer, so feel we are covered. However they would not officially rewrite that into the Holiday Inn corporate contract.

[We will be issuing registration refunds shortly to members minus \$23 for the Proceedings which we'll mail with the refund checks. We are also trying to collect as many of the PowerPoint presentations as possible to post on the SVHFS.org website for download to help fill out some of the details not in the Proceedings. That way you get color pictures, recordings, animations or other things the Proceedings can't as easily convey. Steve N2CEI will continue twisting arms for those files. So authors, please be proactive and send him what you were going to present.]

Back to the timeline:

Ed White WA3BZT fortunately was at the hotel Wednesday night and did manage to get word to several of us via K3TUF and the 432 Net that power was off at the hotel but that there was no damage downtown. Most of us assumed that a few local lines had tripped out and would be reset by the time we got there. And if that happened from the hotel's standpoint there would be no reason why the conference should or could be cancelled.

Still looking forward to the conference, most of us were packed and ready to go Thursday morning, when the calls started coming in from Alabama.

SVHFS member Kim Hensley WG8S with the power company in Huntsville is the one who saved most of us from getting on the road. His inside information that a string of 500 KV towers had gone down, and that it could be 2 to 5 days before power was restored, told us to start thinking seriously about cancellation. However the contract clauses might still have caused problems if power returned during the day Friday.

We were told to watch www.whnt.com a Huntsville TV station that was streaming to the Internet live video and information. At 8:30am CDT Thursday a press conference was scheduled with the Mayor of Huntsville and other emergency management personnel. During that news conference we found the situation was a lot worse than any of us were aware.

Nine super cell storms had produced tornados in three lines that stayed on the ground from Tuscaloosa and into Georgia and Tennessee. Most tornados stay on the ground less than a mile <http://www.wunderground.com/tornado/> then type in Birmingham, Alabama or Huntsville though it may not be updated with the latest info yet, it does have some reports and historical comparison tracks]. This set of storms mowed their way through seven counties before lifting. The tornado that destroyed Tuscaloosa was classified an EF5, the first ever recorded 200+ mph 1.2 mile wide tornado to meet this new top scale of severity. The massive lines of damage these caused had taken all of the power offline for the northern half of Alabama.

Given the sensitivity to nuclear power plant issues Fukushima Japan had caused, area nuclear plants were also scrambled into cold shutdown prior to chances of load interruptions and instability this storm system was causing.

Once we heard the Mayor of Huntsville directing everyone that they were instituting a dusk to dawn curfew, confirming that it might be five days before power was restored, and that all events should be canceled, we had the solid directive needed. That was around 9:45am EDT. And we started calling everyone we had numbers for, which turned out to not be enough. We also emailed and posted messages on various list servers and the SVHFS website in hopes that word would spread via those who did have the contact numbers for people enroute. We did stop a few from getting on planes.

Remember, in a power outage, after about four hours, cell sites' batteries go down too. Many of our calls were getting fast busy and "unavailable" responses. And likewise as people tried to call from inside the Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, north Georgia area, lots of those calls never connected or appeared to, but never rang the phones. I frankly am amazed the phone system and Internet stayed up as much as it did.

And members who were directly affected by the power outage switched to survival mode. The conference was the least of their worries. Keeping food from spoiling and checking on relatives and neighbors was a much higher priority.

If there was a lesson from all this, we do need folks' cell phone numbers. Brian may have had some of those with the registration forms. But the rest of us didn't even know exactly who was planning on coming. It was shaping up to be a good conference with around 90 banquet attendees expected. It was ten months of work flushed in a flicker of the lights.

Think about what a difference 24 hours would have made if the storms had arrived later. Most of us would have been there and partially into the afternoon lectures when the power went out. The airport would have been closed due to the power outage, cutting off chances of escape for those who flew in. Driving away might have placed us in the wrong place at the wrong time in those lines of storms. And

the hotel probably would have felt we'd already started our conference and were due compensation. So do look on the bright side that most were spared a ground zero ordeal. Of course a few rover mobiles might have been pretty useful in the aftermath support as well.

Can any of us for see how these things are going to play out when the weather is involved? No. Some things are beyond our purview. What looks like just a bad passing storm can turn deadly in moments. For those with such excellent foresight, please give us a heads up about weather for our next conference: Charlotte NC, April 20-21st, 2012. Polish up that crystal ball though, because if the same cancellation clauses held, canceling next years' conference, with one year's notice, would still cost \$3,200. Got some good evidence about that Mayan Calendar ? Lots of us would like to know, so we could plan accordingly for 2013 ... or not.

Back to reality: Take a look at www.whnt.com . They're still running continuous disaster coverage. It will change your perspective on how bad things can get.

As of 2pm Sunday, four days after the storms hit, 465,000 people are still without power. This was truly an unprecedented worst in forty years chain of events as hundreds lost their lives and thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed in already tough times. Our thoughts and prayers should be with them.

73,
Charles Osborne, K4CSO
SVHFSociety President