

**RFI and Ham Radio
Pin 1 Problems,
Poor Shielding, Poor Filtering,
and Unintentional Antennas**

Jim Brown

K9YC

<http://audiosystemsgroup.com/publish.htm>

k9yc@arri.net

**Don't Bother Taking Notes
– This Presentation is on
My Website**

<http://audiosystemsgroup.com/publish.htm>

Two Major Kinds of RFI

- **RFI From Our Ham Statio**
 - TVI, Audio/Video Equipment
 - Security Systems, Garage Doors
- **RFI (Noise) To Our Station**
 - Digital Equipment
 - Power Supplies, Chargers
 - Motor Controllers
 - Power Line Equipment Failures

The Heart of the Problem

RFI From Our Ham Station

- Most electronic equipment can work as a radio receiver if allowed to do so
- The wires inside that equipment, and cables that interconnect equipment, are antennas, and can bring radio signals into that equipment

Square Law Detection



- Diodes
- Transistors
- IC's

Square Law Detection



- Diodes
- Transistors
- IC's

Differential Mode Coupling

- Current flow is in opposite directions on conductors in a signal circuit
- Voltage difference between conductors
- Desired signal is differential mode



Differential Mode Coupling

- Current flow is in opposite directions on conductors in a signal circuit
- Voltage difference between conductors
- Noise can be differential mode too



Killing Differential Mode RFI

- Low pass filters kill RF, pass the signal
 - Simple bypass capacitor shorts out noise
 - Series L (or R) blocks noise
- Most RFI is not differential mode



Common Mode Coupling

- Current flows in same direction on all conductors (or on outside of coax shield)
- Voltage difference along conductors
- I/O wiring acts as long wire antenna

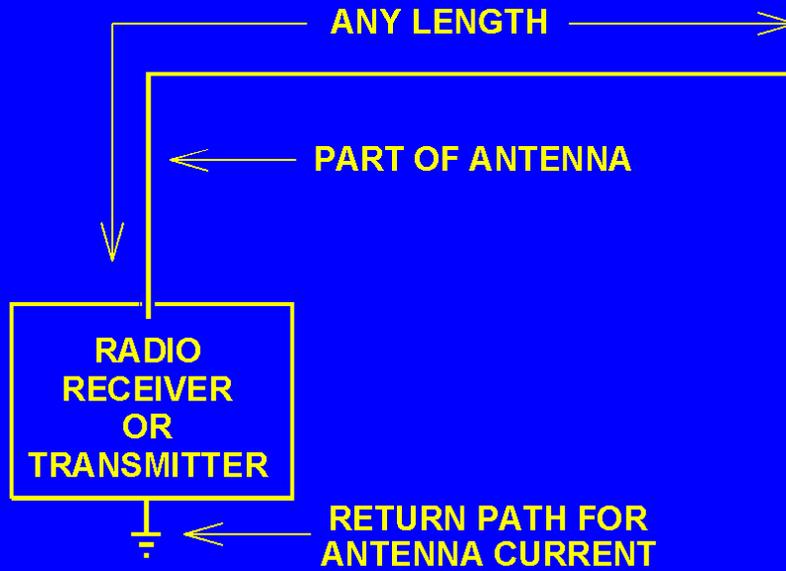


Common Mode Coupling

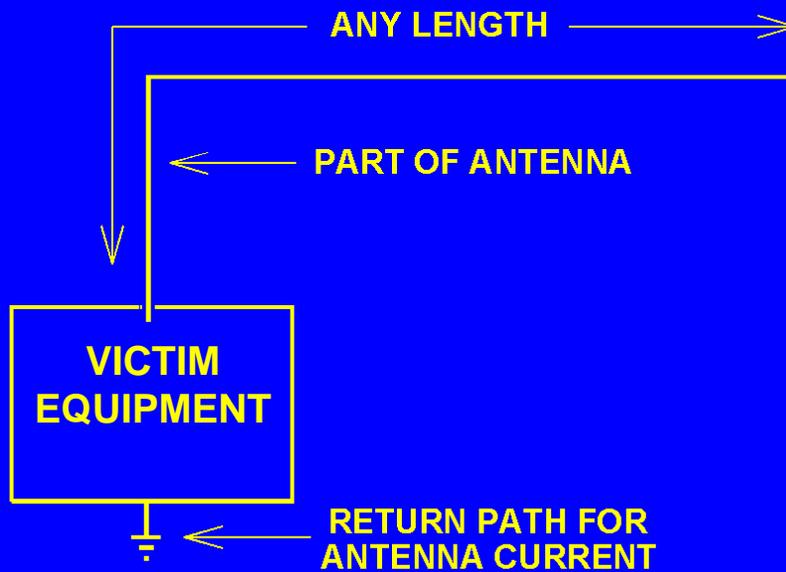
- Current flow in same direction on all conductors (or outside of coax shield)
- Voltage difference along conductors
- Also couples power line hum and buzz



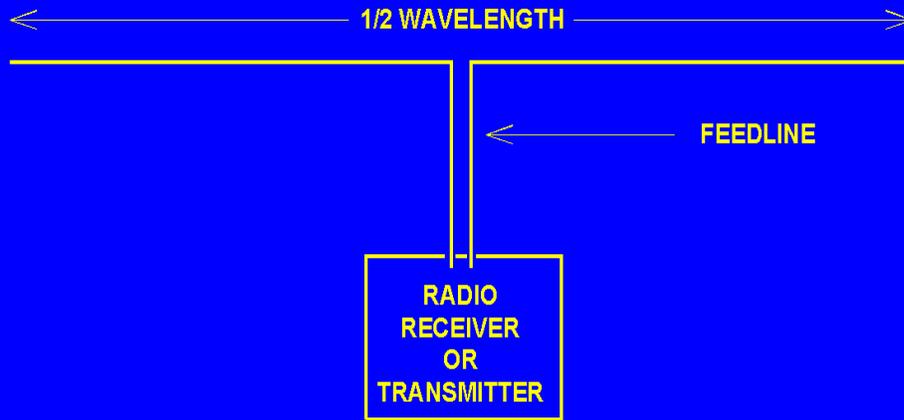
Basic Random Long Wire



Basic Random Long Wire



A “Textbook” $\lambda / 2$ Dipole



Equipment Can Form The Other Half of a Dipole



That’s how a rubber duck works on a talkie – the chassis, plus our arm holding it, are part of the antenna!

Common Mode Coupling

- So How does RF get inside the box?



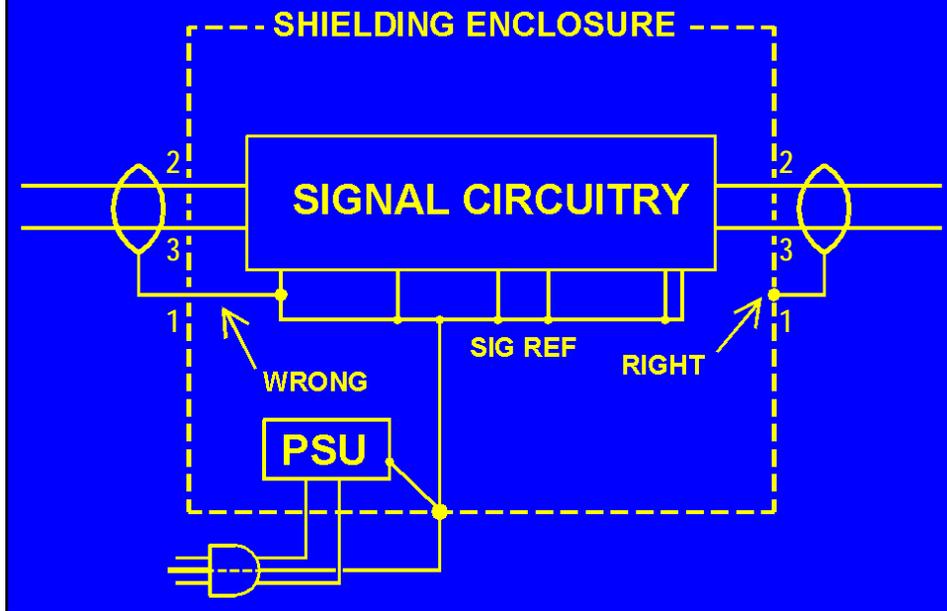
Common Mode Coupling

- So How does RF get inside the box?

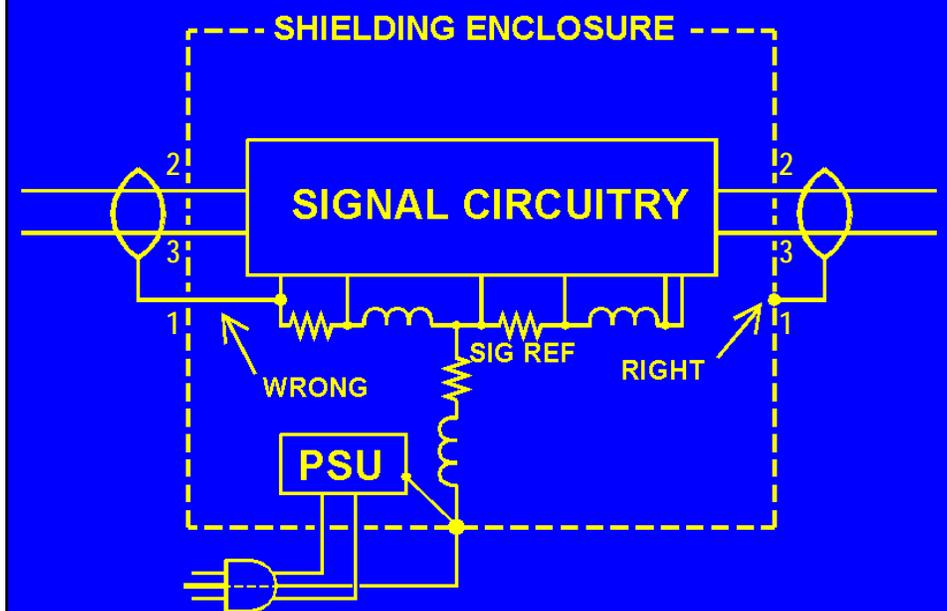
Pin One Problems!



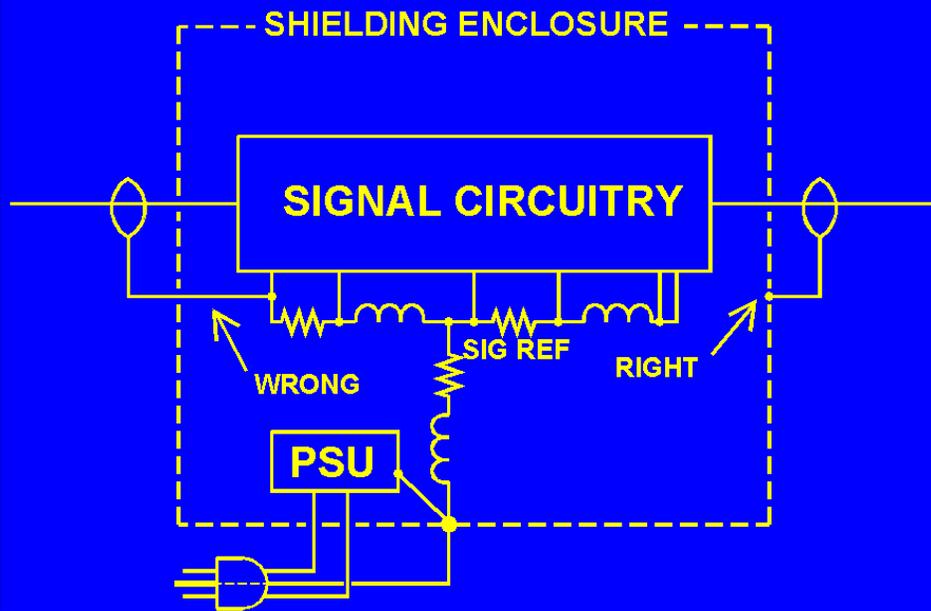
Pin 1 Problem in Balanced Interfaces



Pin 1 Problem in Balanced Interfaces



Pin 1 in Unbalanced Interfaces



**Most RFI is caused by
Pin 1 Problems!**

That Includes “RF in the Shack,” or “RF Feedback!”

How Does It Happen?

- **Connectors mounted to PC board**
- **Shell not bonded to chassis**
 - It should be, but it isn't – that costs more!
- **Often very difficult to fix**
- **All inputs and outputs are usually bad**
 - Audio and video
 - Serial and USB interfaces
 - Control wiring

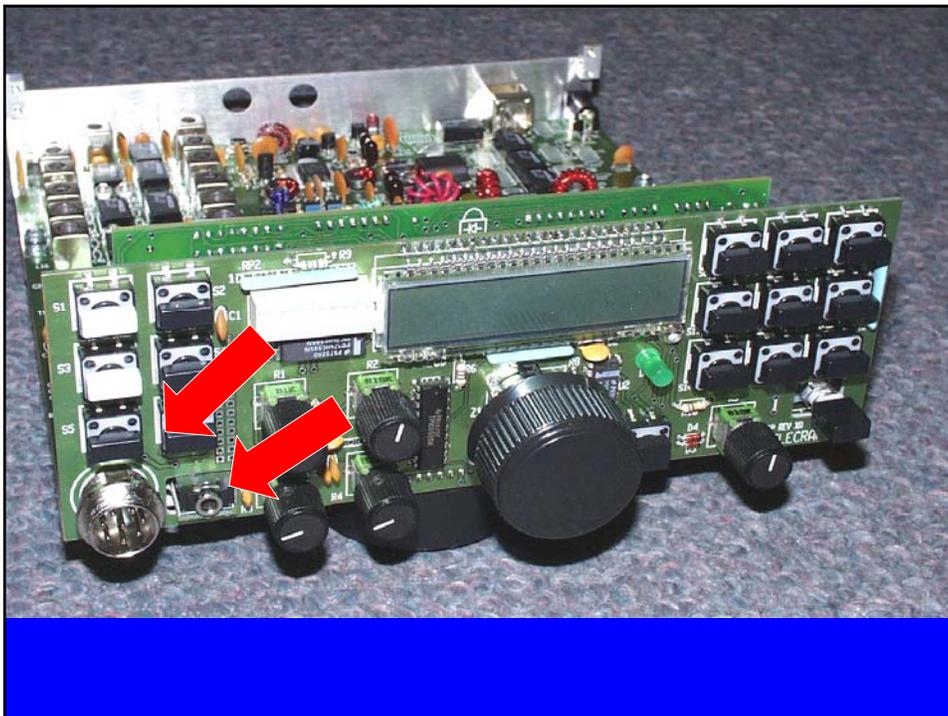
Nearly All Equipment Is Built With Pin 1 Problems

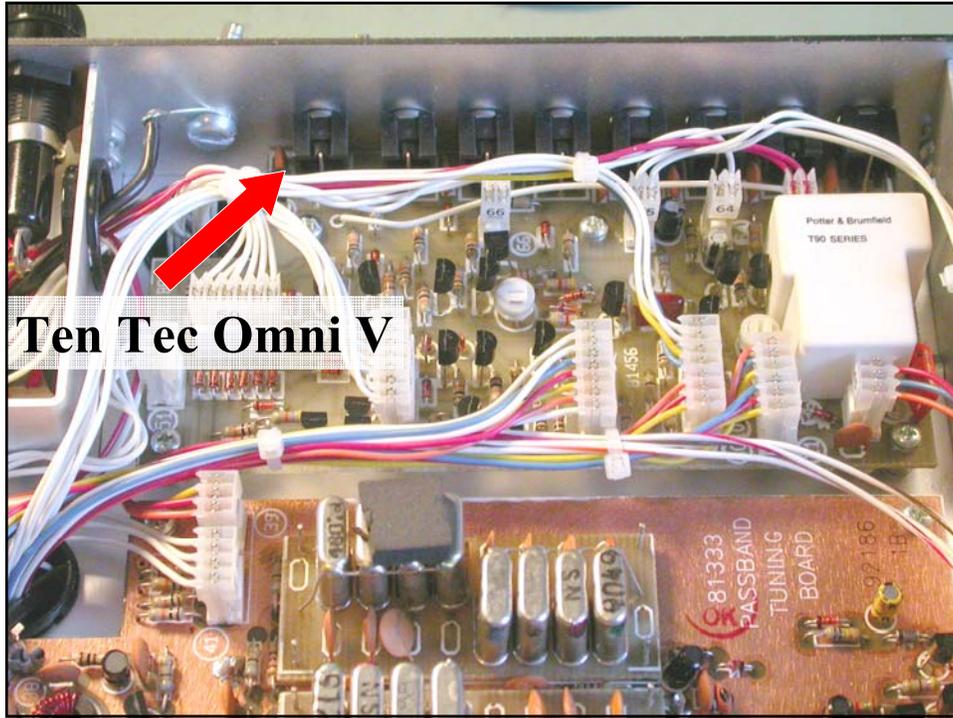
- **Audio and Video Gear**
 - Home and Professional Audio Systems
 - TV Sets, Video Recorders, Cable Boxes
- **Computers and Accessories**
- **Ham Rigs and Accessories**
- **Telephone Equipment**

How Do Pin Problems Happen?



Nice Radio, Has Pin 1 Problems





Ten Tec Omni V



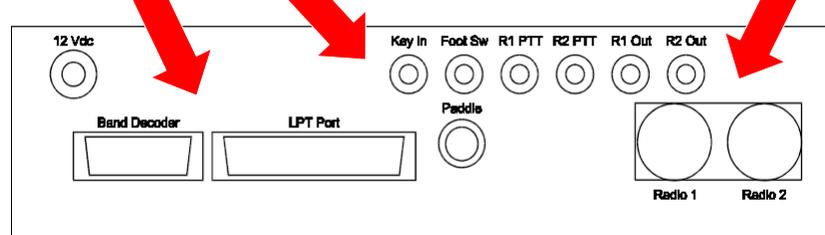
A Pin 1 Problem in FT-1000MP

RF Feedback on 75 and 15 Meters

Multiple Pin 1 problems cause hum, buzz, and probably RF feedback



Rear Panel Connections



Where are the Chassis Connections for this laptop's sound card?

- Hint: It isn't an audio connector shell!
– They should be, but they are not!



**Where are the Chassis Connections
for this laptop's sound card?**

Yes, it's the DB9, DB15, and DB25 shells!



Two Ways to Kill Pin 1 RFI

- **Rewire/rebuild the connector**
 - Wire Pin 1 to the chassis, not PC board
 - Bond connector to chassis, not PC board
- **Kill the current**
 - Make the wiring a lousy antenna
 - Add a common mode choke
 - Short out the current
 - Kill the voltage that causes current flow

Using Ferrites to Tame the Antennas

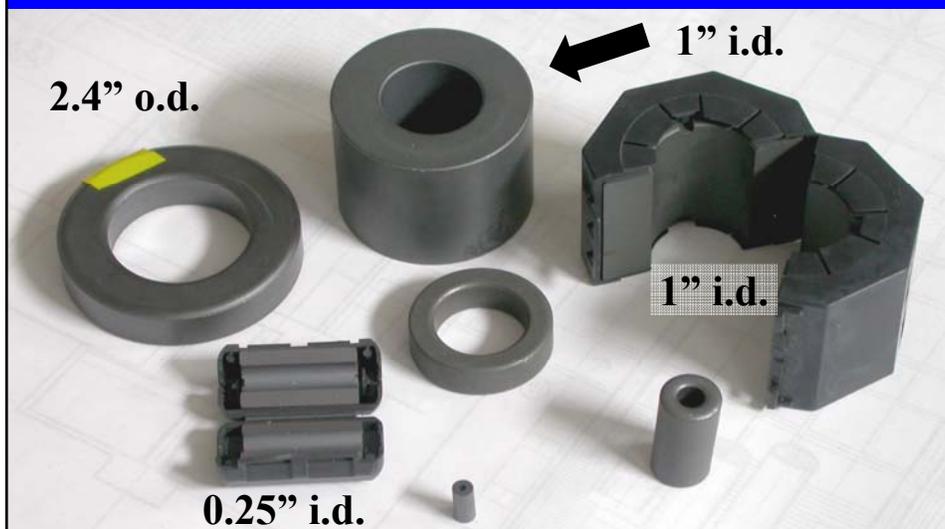
Ferrites can block the current!



What's a Ferrite?

- A ceramic consisting of an iron oxide
 - manganese-zinc – 1-30 MHz
 - nickel-zinc – 30 MHz-1 GHz
- Permeability (μ) much greater than air
 - Better path for magnetic flux than air
 - Multiplies inductance of a wire passed through it
- Is very lossy at radio frequencies
- Does not affect audio

Different sizes and shapes



They can look alike, but be very different



They're brittle!



What Common Mode Chokes Do

- Add high resistive impedance in series with the common mode circuit, reducing antenna current
- Have no effect on differential signals carried between the conductors, inside the cable

This single-turn choke is effective from 80-300 MHz



**This 4-turn choke is about right
for 15-30 MHz**



**This 5-turn choke is about right
for 10-30 MHz**



An Effective Choke for 2-10 MHz

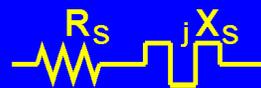


14 turns around a #31 core

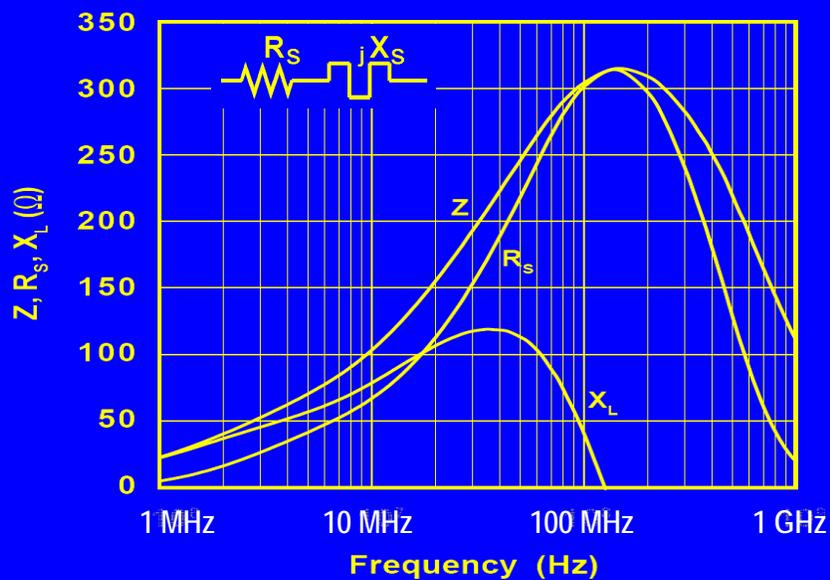
Ferrites and High Power

- **If both conductors of high power circuits are wound through core, the fields cancel, so only the common mode current contributes to saturation**
- **Thus, ferrite common mode are effective on loudspeaker and power wiring**
- **Common mode chokes have no effect on audio, video, or control system signals – they are all differential signals**

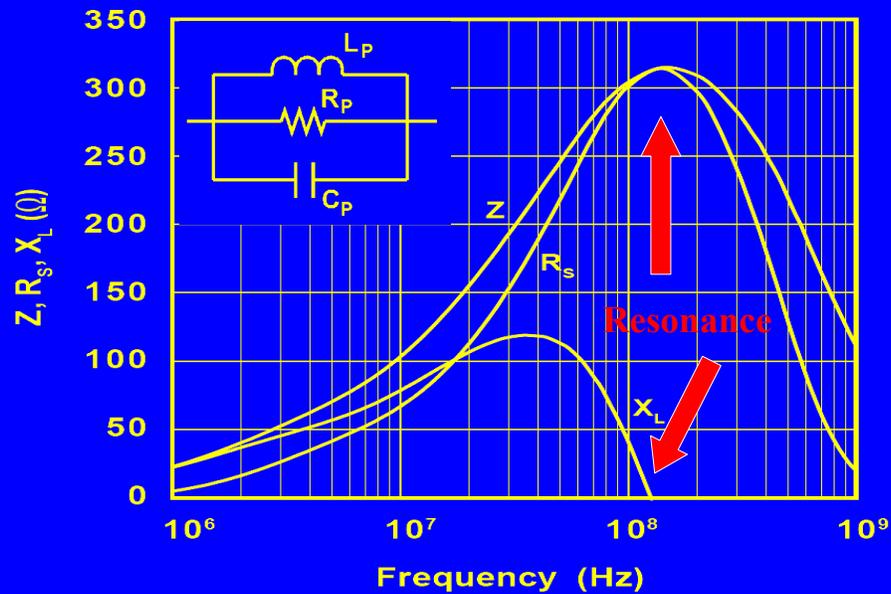
A (too) simple equivalent circuit of a wire passing through a ferrite



Impedance of Wire Through Ferrite



It's Really a Parallel Resonance

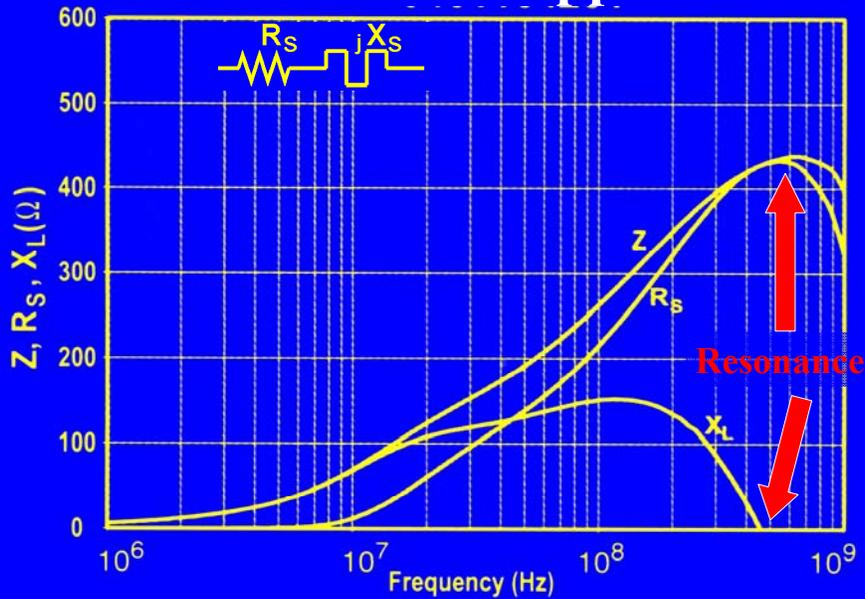


Where's the Capacitance here?

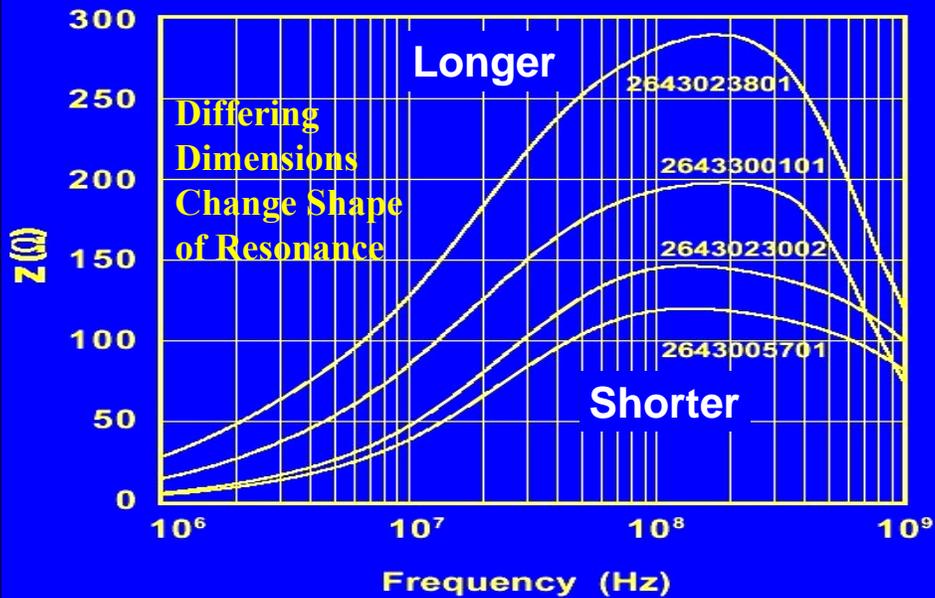


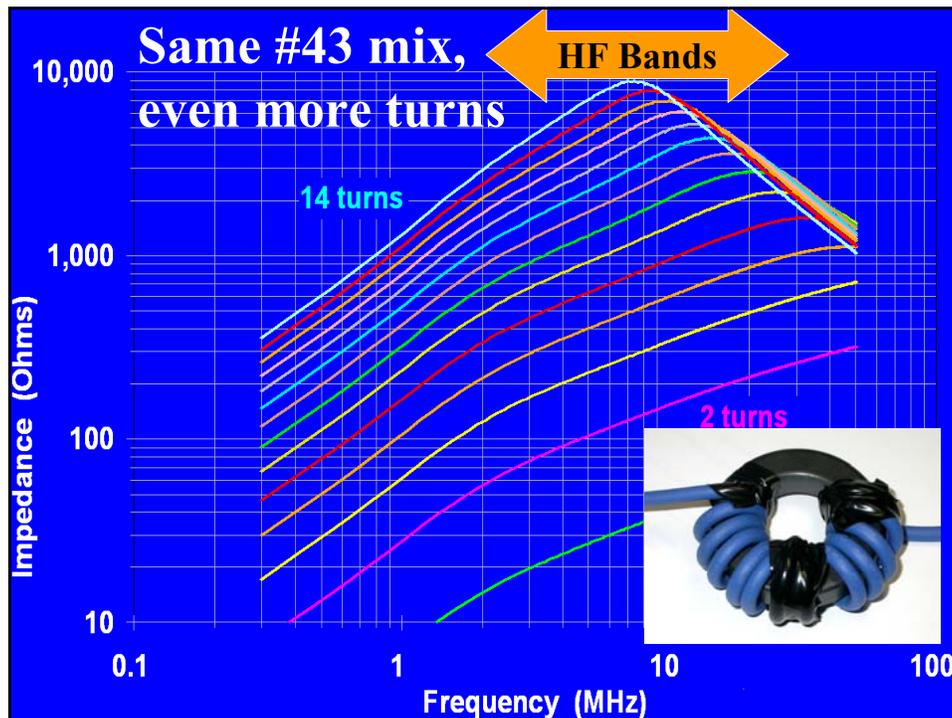
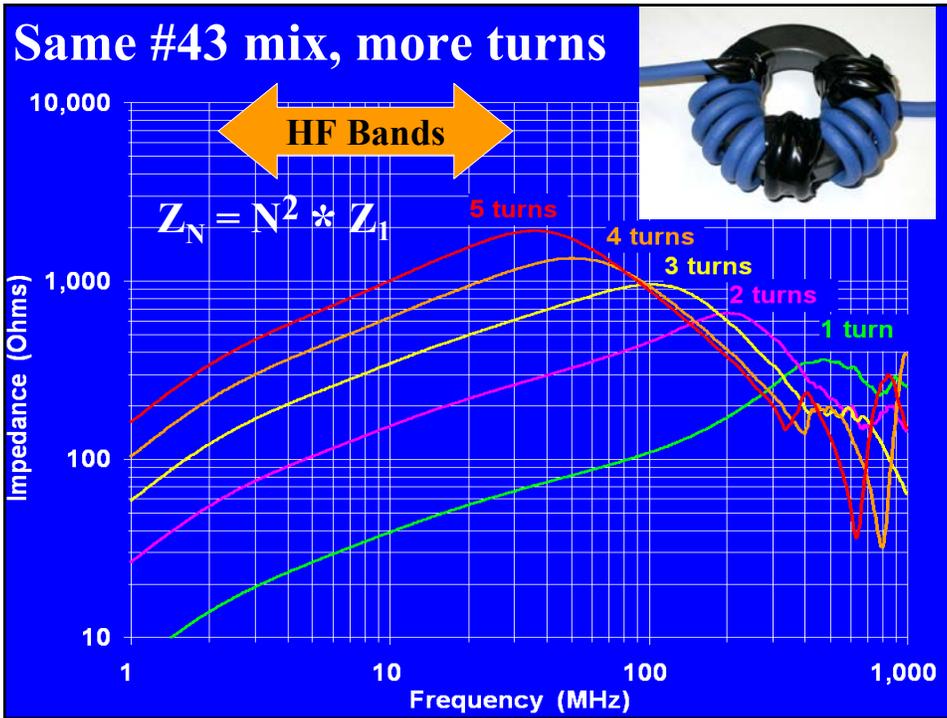
From one end of the choke to the other, through the permittivity of the ferrite (it is a dielectric!)

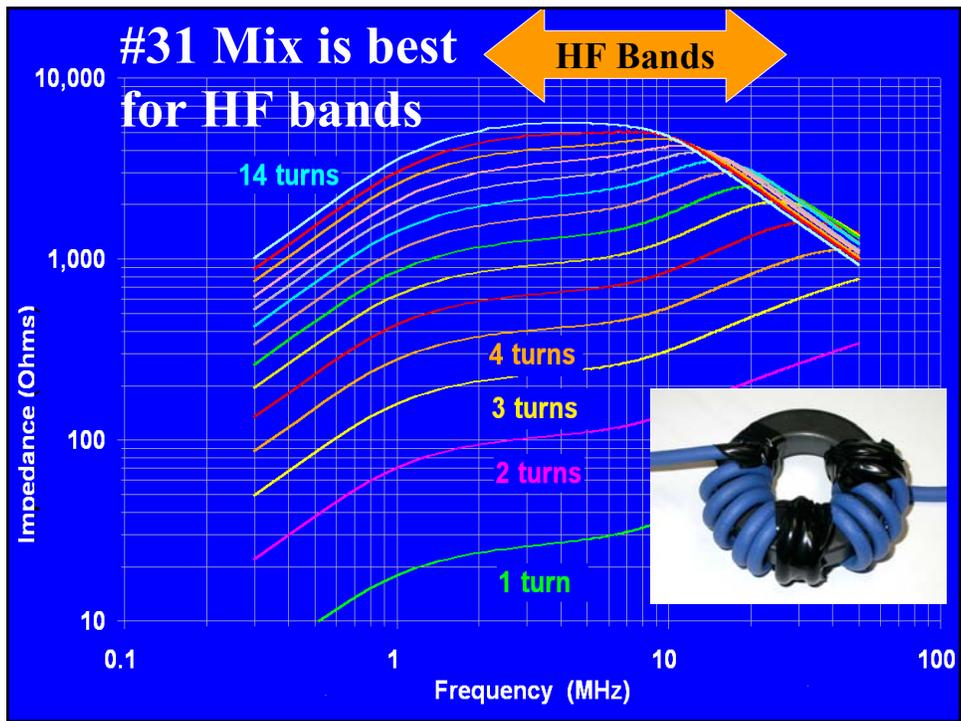
A Ferrite Mix To Suppress UHF



VHF (#43) mix, different lengths!







If you can't easily remove the connector



Solving RFI Problems

Strategy to Kill RFI

- **How bad is the problem?**
- **Where is it getting in (or out)?**
- **Work on most common problems first**
 - **Pin 1 Problems**
 - **Speaker cable**
 - **CATV leakage**
 - **Cables with poor shielding**
- **These problems have easy solutions**

RFI From Your Station

- **How bad is the problem?**
 - Reduce your TX power until RFI stops
 - Convert the reduction to dB – $10 \log (P_2/P_1)$
 - That's how much suppression you need
 - Repeat for each ham band and victim gear
- **If problem is TVI**
 - Interference to picture, or only sound?
 - Interference if TV is off?

Kill Antenna Current

- **Identify the most likely antennas**
- **Add a choke tuned to the RFI**

RFI From Your Station

- **Identify the most likely RX antennas**
- **Start with longer “antennas”**
 - Rooftop and CATV lead-ins, speaker cables
- **Add a ferrite choke tuned to the frequency of the RFI (see graphs)**
- **Attack shorter antennas if still a problem**
 - Interconnect cables in an A/V setup

**This 4-turn choke is about right
for 15-30 MHz**



**This 5-turn choke is about right
for 10-30 MHz**



An Effective Choke for 2-10 MHz



14 turns around a #31 core

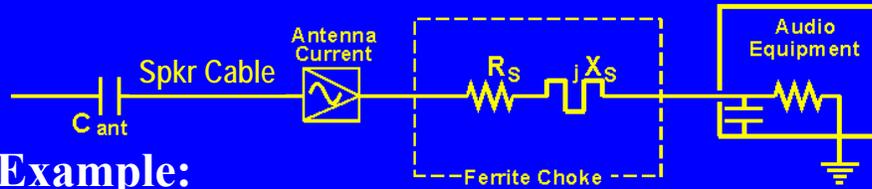
RFI From Your Station

- **If RFI is only to sound, and happens with TV turned off (TV feeds A/V system)**
 - **Problem is in the audio equipment**
 - **Replace speaker wiring with twisted pair**
 - **Choke the speaker wiring first**
 - **Choke cable(s) between TV and audio rig**
 - **Choke coax from antenna or cable box**

You May Not Need an Elephant Gun

- **Most detection is square law, so:**
 - **A 10 dB reduction in RF level reduces audible interference by 20 dB**
- **But we must add enough impedance to overcome the threshold effect**

Threshold Effect



Example:

Our antenna is short, so looks capacitive

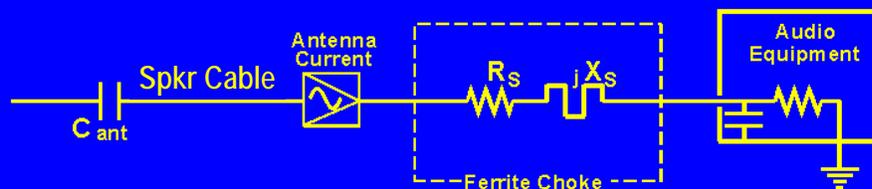
Without the choke, the total antenna circuit is $300 \angle -60^\circ \Omega$,

and we add a choke that is $300 \angle 60^\circ \Omega$,

$$Z_T = (150 - j260) + (150 + j260) = 300 \Omega$$

Our choke has not helped!

Threshold Effect



But if we make the choke larger (more turns or more cores in series), additional R_S will begin to reduce the current.

Increasing R_T to 425Ω (3 dB) reduces detected RF by 6 dB, and increasing R_T to 600Ω (6 dB) reduces detected RF by 12 dB (assuming no change in X_S).

Threshold Effect

- The ferrite choke should add enough series R that the resulting Z is 2x the series Z of the “antenna” circuit without the choke. This reduces RF current by 6 dB, and detected RF by 12 dB.
- Very little suppression occurs until the added R is at least half of the starting Z .
- More choking impedance is better!

Criteria for Good Suppression

- Choke must be predominantly resistive
 - Low Q , near resonance, #31, #43 only
 - Use measured curves to set resonance
- 1,000 ohms is a minimum design goal
- 5k ohms or more needed for RX noise
 - Use more turns to lower resonance
 - Use chokes in series to get more resistance

Criteria for Good Suppression

- **Use only #31 material below 5 MHz**
- **Use #31 or #43 material above 5 MHz**
 - #43 slightly better above 10 MHz

Covering Wide Frequency Ranges

- **Use multiple chokes in series, each tuned to a different frequency range**
- **Put highest frequency choke closer to the equipment**
- **Example:**
 - 14 turns on #31 toroid for 2-10 MHz
 - 8 turns on #31 or #43 toroid for 10-30 MHz

**This expensive loudspeaker cable
makes equipment vulnerable to RFI**



**Parallel wire (zip cord) has very
poor RFI rejection**

**Twisted pair cables help
equipment reject RFI**



#12 POC * is great loudspeaker cable!



POC – Plain Ordinary Copper

RFI From Your Station

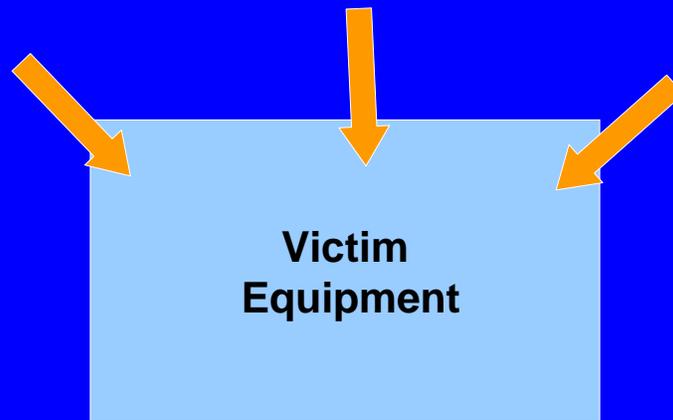
- **If RFI causes picture and sound breakup, the TV or cable box is most likely problem**
 - **Choke coax from roof antenna, cable box, or satellite downlink**
 - **Choke cables to video recorder, A/V rig**
- **If chokes don't help and TV is on a CATV system, check for leakage in that system**

Leaky CATV Systems

- **Tune an FM talkie to 145.25 and probe around CATV wiring look for a buzzy carrier (cable channel 18)**
- **When you find a buzzy carrier, you've found a leak**
- **There may be more than one**
- **The CATV company should fix their leaks**
- **Leaks also spew RF trash on ham bands**

Poor Equipment Shielding

- Internal wiring is receiving antenna



Antennas Inside Equipment

- Wires and circuit traces are antennas too
 - Shield the equipment
- or:
- Add a ground plane on a second layer
 - Each circuit trace is now a transmission line
 - Current returns on ground plane under trace
 - Minimizes the loop area
 - Minimizes antenna action
 - Microstrip (one ground plane)
 - Stripline (two ground planes sandwich the trace)

Shielding Failures

- **Plastic cases**
- **Openings in shielded cases**
 - Gaps between pieces of metal case
 - Paint at joint of metal surfaces creates a slot opening, RF escapes
- **Cables enter case without bond to case**
- **Breaking a ground plane under a trace**
 - Defeats the ground plane – current flows in a big loop, becomes antenna and magnetic loop

No Easy Fixes for Most Equipment Shielding Failures

- **Scrape the paint to close slot openings**
- **Bond cable shields to the case**
- **Most other shielding problems usually require a complete rebuild**
- **Return to manufacturer as defective**
- **Give it the bucket treatment**

The Bucket Treatment

- Find a bucket large enough to hold the defective equipment
- Fill it with water
- Put the equipment in twice
- Take it out once

Poor Cable Shielding

- Shield current is converted to a differential voltage
- Poor filtering lets it inside the box



Cable Shielding Problems

- **Many common A/V cables have poor shields**
 - **Add a ferrite choke to the cable**
- or:**
- **Build your own cables using coax with a robust copper braid shield (RG174, RG58)**

Making Your Own Audio Cables

- **Much better than you can buy**
- **Use coax with robust copper braid shield**
- **Use Switchcraft and Neutrik Connectors**
 - Full Compass Systems, Madison, WI
 - Sweetwater, Ft. Wayne, IN
- **Buy connectors in quantity – shipping is much of the cost**
- **Expensive high futility stuff not a solution**

Cable-Mount Audio Connectors

<u>Description</u>	<u>Switchcraft</u>	<u>Neutrik</u>
3-ckt male 1/8" plug	35HDNN	NYS231BG
2-ckt male 1/8" plug		NYS226BG
3-ckt female 1/8" jack		NYS240BG
Phono (RCA) male plug	3502	NYS352
Phono female jack	3503	

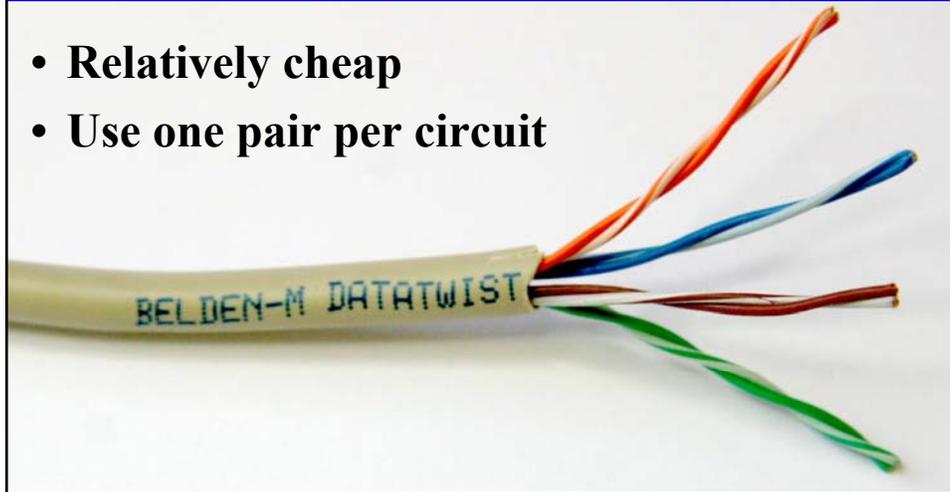
Cable Problems – Paired Cable

- **Parallel wires (zip cord) cause RFI**
- **Twisted pair cable rejects hum, buzz, RFI**
- **Replace zip cord with twisted pair**
 - CAT5/6 for telephone wiring, security systems
 - #14 gauge between loudspeakers and power amp
 - CAT5/6 for RS232 cables, one pair per circuit
 - Improvements of 20-30dB (100-1,000X the power)
- **Twisting is far more important than shielding**

CAT5 is 4 Very Good Twisted Pairs

- **Excellent for audio, digital, telephone, control wiring, RS232**

- **Relatively cheap**
- **Use one pair per circuit**



RFI to Telephones and DSL Modems

- **Use only CAT5/6 for telephone wiring**
- **Use one pair for each circuit**
 - **Blue = hot, blue/white = return**
- **Tune DSL chokes to ~2 MHz**
 - **30 turns on one #31 toroid**
 - **22 turns on two #31 toroids**
- **Place choke very close to DSL modem**
- **Use add'l choke(s) if needed**

RFI to Telephones and DSL Modems

- **Choke every cable connected to phone or modem**
- **Try for at least 10k ohms**
- **Telephones are known RFI dogs**
- **For wireless phones, choke the cable(s) at the base station**

Security Systems

- **Very poor RF rejection**
- **Connections between sensor and main unit are usually a simple switch contact**
 - **Try a small cap (470-1000 pF) across the cable pair at the main unit**
 - **Replace wiring with twisted pair**
 - **Chokes may help, but are not the first thing to try**

Security Systems

- **When connections carry data**
 - **Do not use a capacitor**
 - **Replace wiring with CAT5**
 - **Add choke at both ends**
- **When data is carried on the power line**
 - **Use twisted triplet cable for power wiring**
 - **Put power in steel conduit if you can**
 - **Call the manufacturer and force them to fix it**

The Other Half of the Problem – RFI to Ham Radio

RFI To Ham Radio

- **RF noise is generated inside equipment**
- **The wires inside equipment, and cables that interconnect equipment, are antennas, and can transmit that RF noise**
- **The same problems that let RF into the box also let it out of the box**
 - **Pin One Problems**
 - **Poor shielding and poor circuit layout**
- **Our antennas receive it like any other signal**

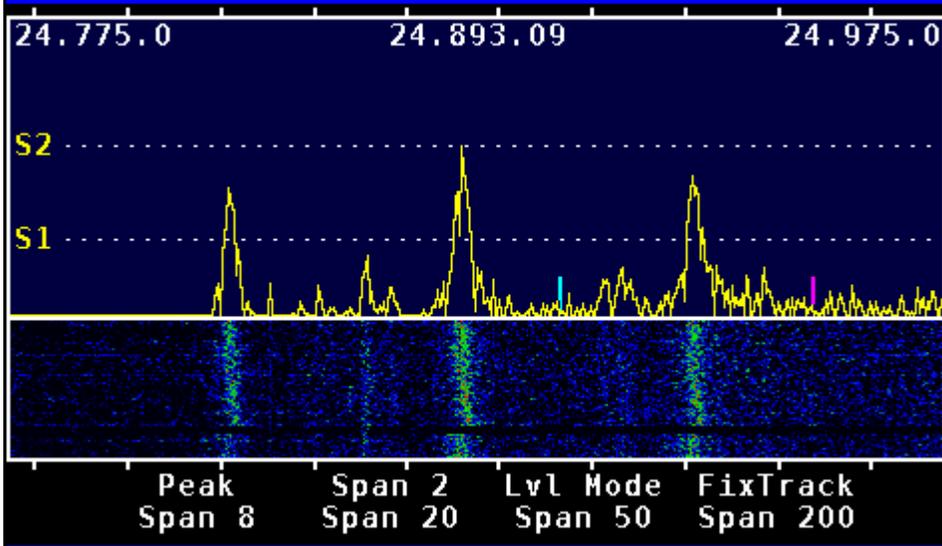
Sources of RF Noise

- **Switching Power Supplies, including Battery Chargers**
- **Equipment with digital circuitry**
 - **Computers, audio and video gear, ham gear**
- **Plasma TV Sets**
- **Faulty Insulators in Power Systems**
- **Variable Speed Motors**

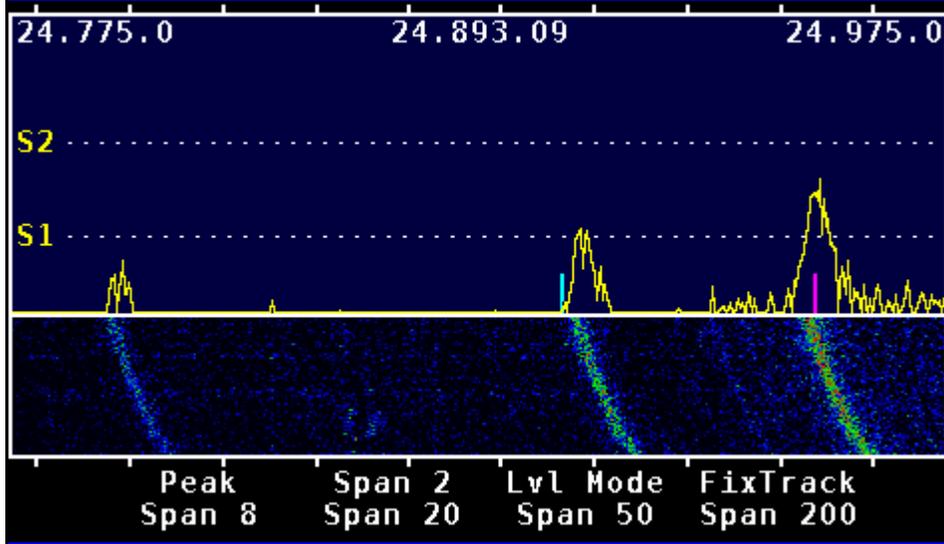
What is Digital Noise?

- Most digital noise results from oscillators or clocks that produce square waves
- Square waves have lots of harmonics
- Fast rise times = strong harmonics

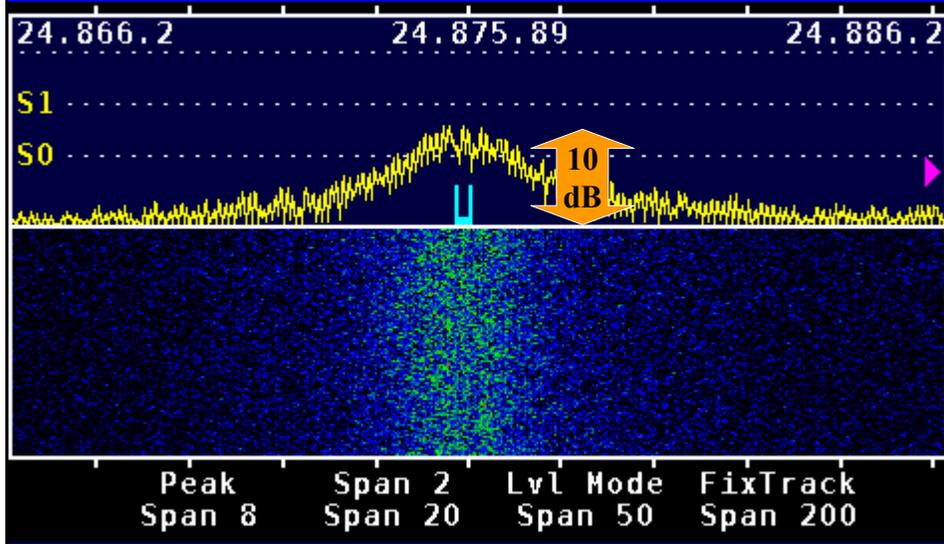
Typical noise signature of a switching power supply



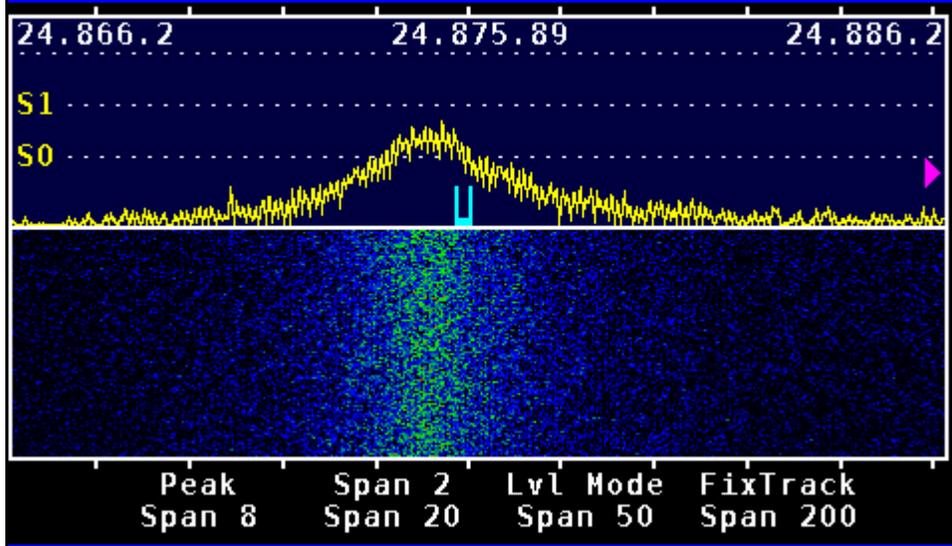
The same switching PSU drifting after being switched on



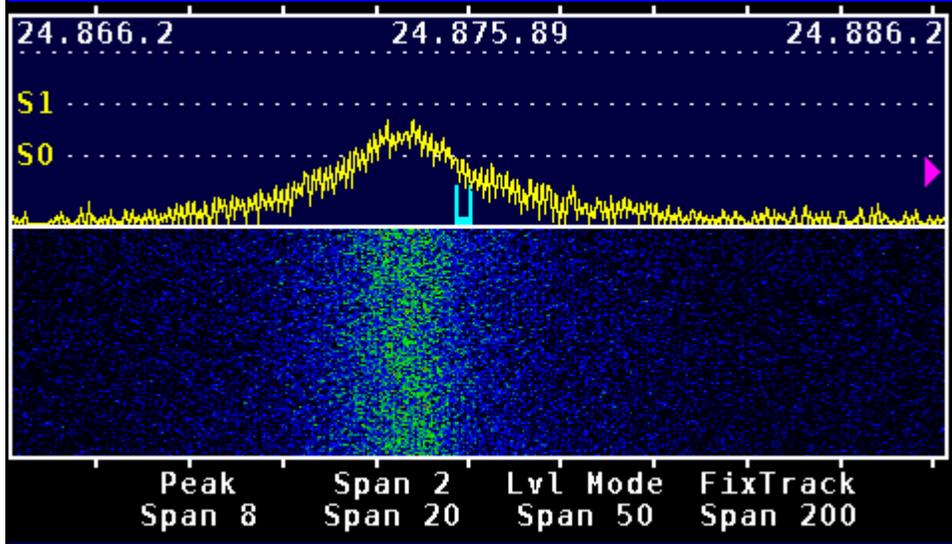
A closer look at one of the peaks

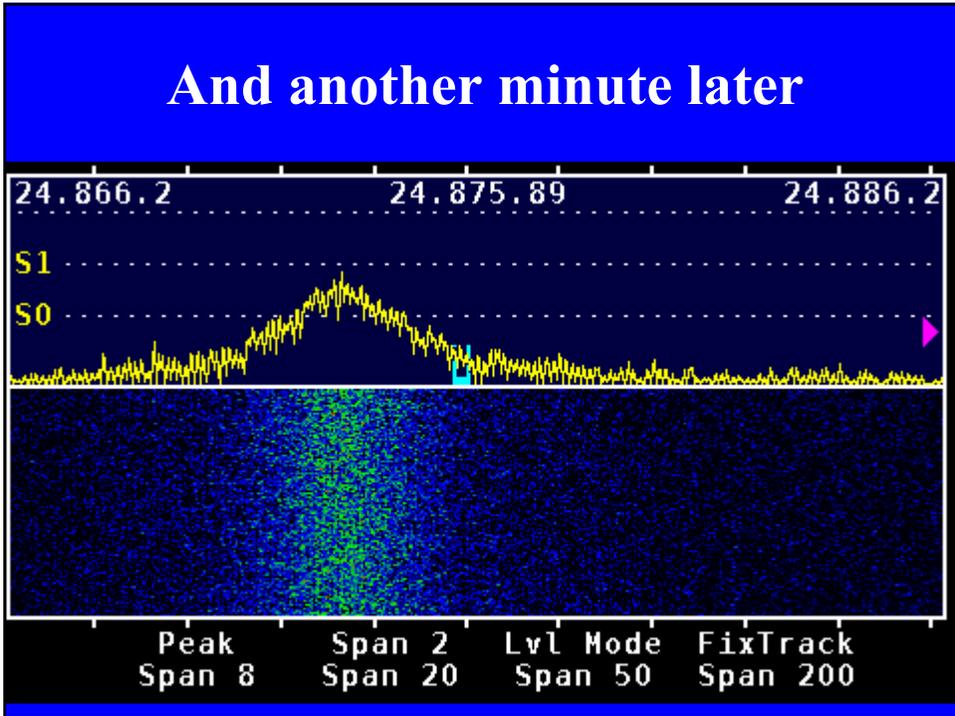
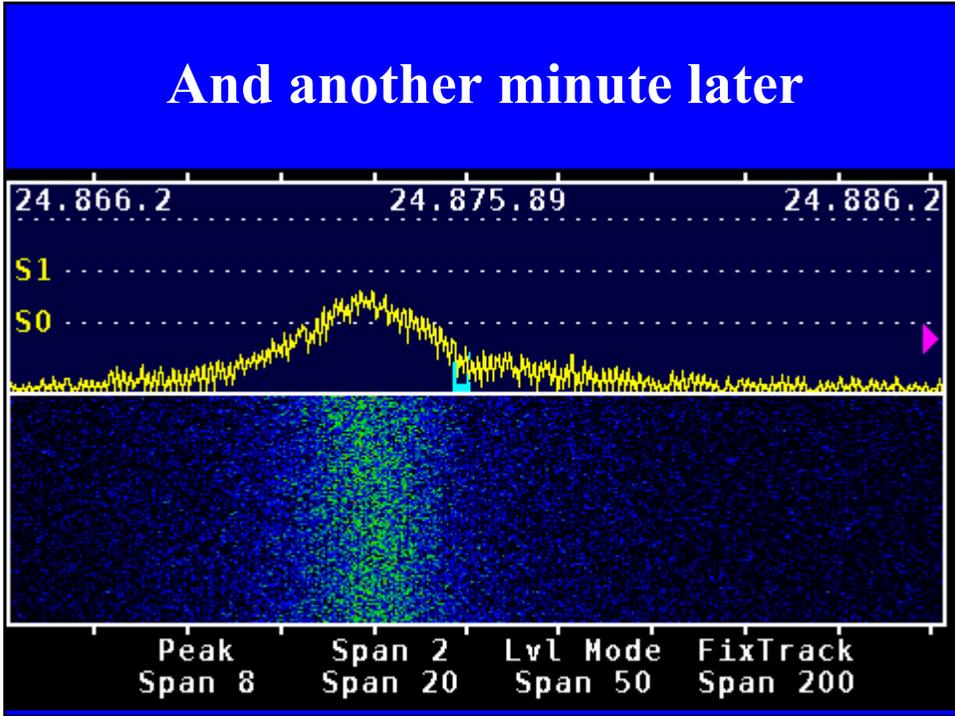


Same picture, a minute later



And another minute later





That's the PSU for my SteppIR

- **I'd already suppressed the noise by more than 20dB before I took these pictures!**
- **I've worked a lot of guys who don't move my S-meter**
- **10 dB of noise makes a 1kW signal seem like a 100W signal**
- **20dB of noise makes 1kW seem like 1W**
- **You can't work 'em if you can't hear 'em!**
- **It's really worth it to chase and kill RX noise**

Why a Hump Instead of a Steady Carrier?

- **Oscillators are *dithered* (FM-modulated by noise) to skirt FCC RFI rules**
- **That noise causes them to wobble around in frequency or drift, and the modulation makes them broad**
- **FCC rules limit the strength of carriers, so the FM noise moves some of power from carrier to sidebands**

The Principle of Reciprocity – Coupling Works Both Ways

- **Problems that let RFI into the box also let it out of the box**
 - **Pin One Problems**
 - **Poor Shielding**
 - **Poor Filtering**
 - **Large magnetic loop area**
 - **Accidental Antennas**

The Principle of Reciprocity – Coupling Works Both Ways

- **Techniques that minimize received interference will generally also reduce transmitted noise**
- **Relative strength of coupling depends on impedances of the coupled circuits, and may not be equal in both directions**

RFI To Your Station

- **How bad is the problem?**
- **Band noise should increase when the band is open, quiet when it is dead**
 - **10-20dB increase is typical**
 - **Noise on 40, 80 and 160 should be low during the day, increase 10-20dB at night**
 - **Higher bands should also increase, but timing more complex**

Measuring RFI To Your Station

- **Most S-meters not very accurate**
- **One S-unit should be 6dB, but for most it's more like 3-4 dB**
- **A properly aligned K3 is accurate**
- **Our objective is to reduce local RX noise so that we see noise increase when the band is open**

RFI To Your Station

- **Start with your own home first**
- **Run your station on a battery and kill power to your home**
 - **Be sure to turn off any UPS units**
- **Any noise that goes away is your noise**
- **Restore power, and turn off one breaker at a time until noise stops (or gets weaker)**

RFI To Your Station

- **Start with your own home first**
- **Learn to locate and kill noise at home, so you don't look like a dummy if you can work on your neighbors' noise**

RFI To Your Station

- **Noise must be killed at the source**
- **You must find the source to kill the noise**
- **Exception – use antenna location and directivity to reduce noise**
 - **Move antennas away from noise sources**
 - **Use serious chokes on your feedlines at the feedpoint (that is, up in the air)**

RFI From Digital Equipment

- **What are the antennas?**
 - **Every interconnecting cable**
 - **The AC power line**
- **Wind multiple turns of AC cable through toroid to form choke**
- **Wind every interconnect cable through toroid to form choke**

RFI From TV Sets, Cable Boxes

- **What are the antennas?**
 - Every audio/video cable
 - Coax from antenna, cable box, or DVR
 - The AC power line
- **Wind multiple turns of AC cable through toroid to form choke**
- **Wind every interconnect cable through toroid to form choke**

**This 4-turn choke is about right
for 15-30 MHz**



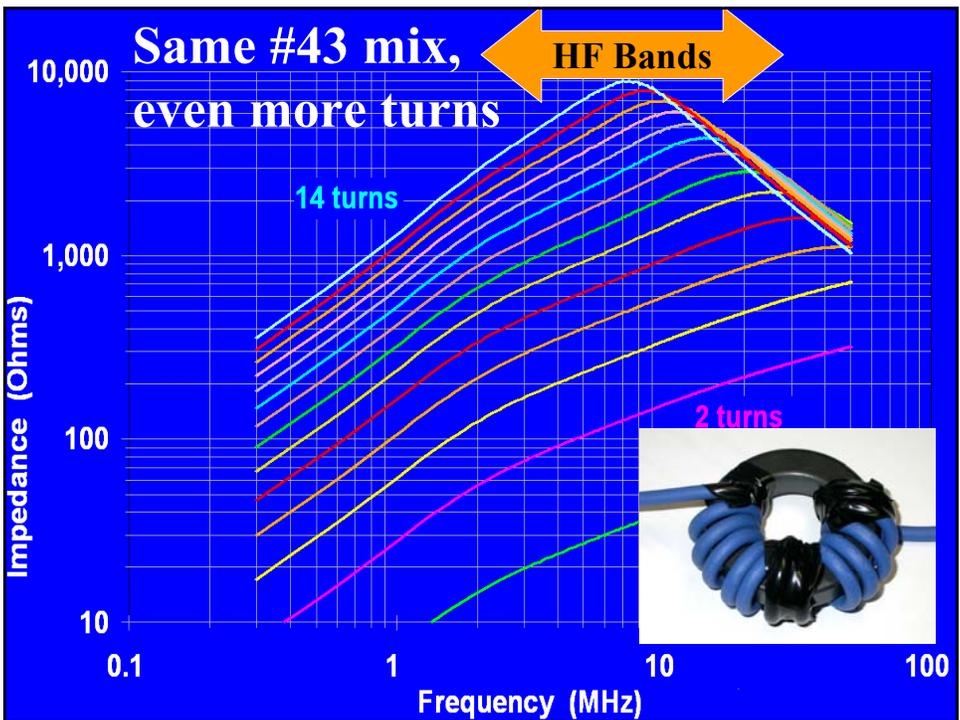
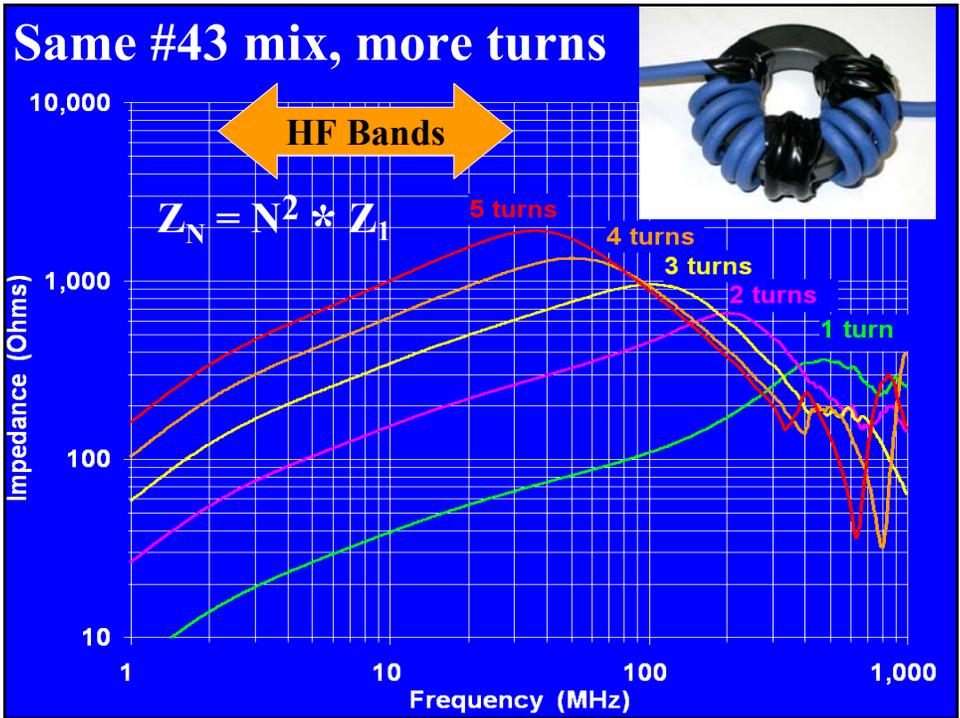
**This 5-turn choke is about right
for 10-30 MHz**

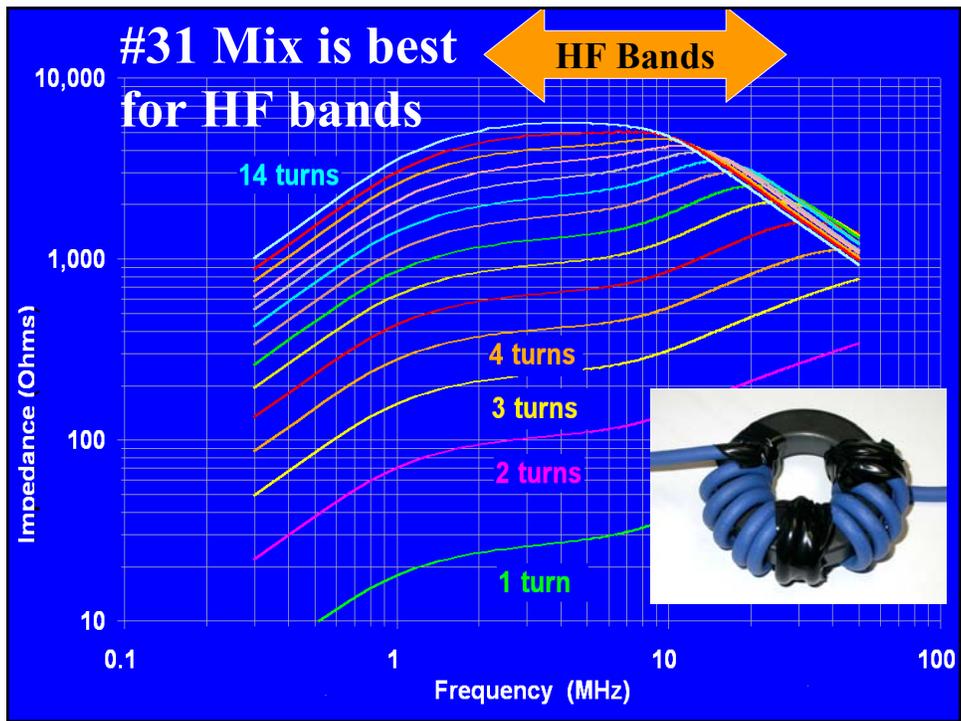


An Effective Choke for 2-10 MHz



14 turns around a #31 core







RFI From Switching Power Supplies

- What are the antennas?
 - The DC cable
 - The AC power line

Noisy Equipment Solutions

RFI From Battery Chargers

- **What are the antennas?**
 - The AC power line
 - The DC cable, if there is one
- **Treat it like any other switching power supply – choke the antennas!**

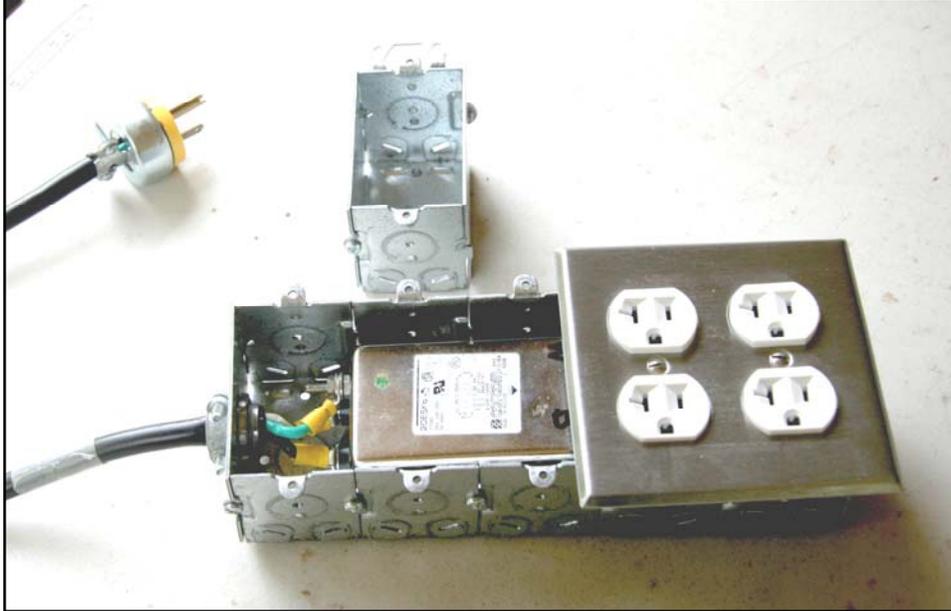
RFI From Switching Power Supplies

- **Wind each DC cable through a ferrite core to form a choke**
- **Plug supplies into multi-outlet boxes and wind AC power cable through toroids to form chokes**
- **If you can, replace switching power supplies with linear power supplies**
 - **Rewire with Anderson Power Poles**
 - **Be sure to get the voltage right**

Plug Noisy Power Supplies Into Filtered Power Outlets



A Field Day Generator RFI Filter



Field Day Generator RFI Filter Also Needs Ferrite Choke



RFI To Your Station

- **Identifying Ethernet birdies**
 - Crystal controlled, wide tolerance, modulated
 - Around 14,030 kHz, 21,052 kHz, low end of 10M CW, low end of 6M
 - Multiple signals – you will hear your neighbors too, each on a slightly different frequency
 - Kill power to your router to see if birdies go away, work on those carriers
 - Wind each ethernet cable around toroid
 - 6-8 turns usually about right
 - Some trash due to poorly shielded box

RFI To Your Station

- **Killing Ethernet birdies**
 - Wind each cable around toroid
 - 6-8 turns usually about right
 - Don't forget power supply cable
 - Some trash due to poorly shielded box
- **Use shortest cables possible**
 - Longer cable is better antenna

Two More Equipment Design Issues

- **Magnetic Coupling**
- **Fast Rise Times**

Magnetic Coupling

- **A problem often overlooked by circuit and system designers**
- **A very potent coupling mechanism**
- **Strongly couples any large currents**
 - **Switching power supplies**
 - **Battery chargers**
 - **Variable speed motor controllers**
 - **Lighting controllers**
 - **Solar power systems and regulators**

Current Flows in Loops

- **Where does the return current flow?**
 - Large loop area = strong magnetic field
 - Large loop area = more magnetic reception
 - Long wires = better antennas
- **Good RFI design = very small loop areas and short antennas (or no antennas)**
 - Place RF bypass cap directly between C and E of switching transistor, zero length leads
 - Keeps the loop area small for RF current

Rise Time

- **RF trash proportional to switching speed**
- **Good RFI design = slow down the rise times of large pulsed currents**
- **Fast switching = lower power dissipation**
- **These are conflicting requirements**
- **Small rounding of waveform can greatly reduce RFI with little effect on dissipation**

Troubleshooting RFI

- RFI often enters equipment (and systems) by more than one path.
- **When you find one path, always assume that there may be others!**
- Take a methodical approach. Don't give up when one "right" technique doesn't fix it – keep on doing other "right" things. The "right" techniques really are right!

Troubleshooting RFI

- It usually helps to have an assistant
- You operate your station while your assistant watches/listens for RFI in your living room (or your neighbor's)
- Your assistant listens to your station while you kill breakers one at a time to find noise sources, then add chokes as needed
- Use talkies to communicate

The Biggest Myths

Myth: “I need a better ground”

Fact: A connection to earth almost never reduces noise or RFI, and it will often make it worse, because the “ground wire” can act as an antenna.

Fact: A connection to earth is very important for lightning protection.

The Biggest Myths

Myth: “I need a separate RF ground”

Fact: Separate grounds are unsafe – they can kill someone, increase lightning damage, even start a fire.

Fact: Separate grounds are more likely to cause problems than to fix them.

Fact: BY LAW, all grounds must be bonded together

Definitive Text On RFI

*Electromagnetic Compatibility
Engineering, Henry Ott, Wiley, 2009*

References

- Henry Ott, *Electromagnetic Compatibility Engineering*, Wiley Interscience, 2009
- E. C. Snelling, *Soft Ferrites, Properties and Applications*, CRC Press, 1969
- E. C. Snelling and A. D. Giles, *Ferrites for Inductors and Transformers*, Research Study Press, 1983
- *Fair-Rite Products Catalog* This 200-page catalog is a wealth of product data and applications guidance on practical ferrites. <http://www.fair-rite.com>
- *Ferroxcube Catalog and Applications Notes* More online from another great manufacturer of ferrites. <http://www.ferroxcube.com>

References

- *Noise Susceptibility in Analog and Digital Signal Processing Systems*, N. Muncy, JAES, June 1995
- *Radio Frequency Susceptibility of Capacitor Microphones*, Brown/Josephson (AES Preprint 5720)
- *Common Mode to Differential Mode Conversion in Shielded Twisted Pair Cables (Shield Current Induced Noise)*, Brown/Whitlock (AES Preprint 5747)
- *Testing for Radio Frequency Common Impedance Coupling in Microphones and Other Audio Equipment*, J. Brown (AES Preprint 5897)
- *A Novel Method of Testing for Susceptibility of Audio Equipment to Interference from Medium and High Frequency Broadcast Transmitters*, J. Brown (AES Preprint 5898)

References

- *New Understandings of the Use of Ferrites in the Prevention and Suppression of RF Interference to Audio Systems*, J. Brown (AES Preprint 6564)
- *Understanding How Ferrites Can Prevent and Eliminate RF Interference to Audio Systems*, J. Brown Self-published tutorial (on my website)
- *A Ham's Guide to RFI, Ferrites, Baluns, and Audio Interfacing*, J. Brown Self-published tutorial (on my website)

Applications notes, tutorials, and my AES papers are on my website for free download

<http://audiosystemsgroup.com/publish>