



Hearing loops going mainstream

When the Governor of Minnesota signed the Capital Improvement Appropriations Bill* last May he was not just approving appropriations, he was approving a requirement that all future construction of (or improvements to) state funded “gathering places” that are equipped with a public address system must also be equipped with an inductive loop assistive listening system commonly called a hearing loop. Recognizing that there could be facilities where electromagnetic interference or other problems would preclude the use of loop technology, the bill allowed for exemptions but loops appear to be on the path of becoming the predominant assistive listening system in the state.

This move in Minnesota mirrors action also taken this year by the New York City Council where a similar requirement was put in place. They were followed by the announcement from the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) that they would be including hearing loops in all new rail cars ordered for their system. The requirement to use hearing loop technology in place of FM or Infra Red systems shows that the adoption of this consumer preferred technology has gained momentum to the delight of hearing aid wearers who, in a recent survey, indicated they are six times more likely to use a hearing loop than an FM or infra red system.

In their simplest form, hearing loops are a copper wire looping or otherwise configured in a room that transmit sound through an electromagnetic field to receivers called telecoils in hearing aids and cochlear implants. For those whose hearing aids don't have telecoils (or those who do not wear hearing aids), hearing loops work in the same manner as FM or IR systems - the user borrows a receiver and headset to access the system. Growing numbers with hearing loss across America now participate in worship services, enjoy theatrical presentations and listen to concerts and proceedings in “looped” venues. The hearing loop reduces background noise and provides a clear signal for better speech comprehension. One can think of a hearing loop as the wheelchair ramp for people who suffer hearing loss.

Hearing loops are the primary assistive listening technology in Great Britain and much of Western Europe. They can be found in airports, places of worship, legislative chambers – even in London taxi cabs and “train to the plane” services. They allow those with telecoil equipped hearing aids to wirelessly connect directly to the sound system to hear and understand anything from simple announcements to religious services and the technology is sweeping into the same venues here in America. In New York City, over 600 subway information/fare kiosks have been equipped with hearing loops. All new taxi cabs feature loops and several Broadway theaters are looped. Places of worship have taken the lead in adopting this technology for their sanctuaries with well over 400 installing it in Michigan and with a similar number in Wisconsin. When places like the Grand Rapids, MI airport and the Oshkosh, WI Grand Opera House are added in, those two states contain over 1,000 looped facilities - even the 12,000 seat Breslin Center at Michigan State University has been looped.

Here in New Mexico there are now over 120 venues known to be using hearing loops. This does not include each of the screens in most multiplex theaters where neckloop versions of the technology are an option in place of headsets nor the many places of worship that have added the neckloop option to their assistive listening system. Untold hundreds of home TV rooms have been looped and neckloops are in use for talking on land line or cellular phones, for listening to Mp3 players or the sounds of movies or aural books on smart phones or tablet computers.

For more information on hearing loops, contact Steve Frazier at (505) 401-4195, at LoopNM@gmail.com or visit www.LoopNM.com.

* To read the complete text of the Minnesota regulation, to go page 61, line 12 at:

https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF5&version=1&session=ls90&session_year=2017&session_number=1&format=pdf.



Stephen O. Frazier, Hearing Loss Support Specialist
Chair - Loop New Mexico Committee - www.LoopNM.com
Member - HAAA National Hearing Loop Steering Committee
Co-Chair - Committee for Communication Access in New Mexico
hlaanm@juno.com - (505) 401-4195

