



EsPRSS-0

Today's Blends

[Opening Shot](#) | [The News](#) | [Tips'n'Tricks](#) | [We Want to Hear From You!](#)

Opening Shot

PRSS Releases New Audio Loudness Standard

The Public Radio Satellite System (PRSS) has released a new broadcast loudness standard aimed at normalizing audio levels among programs, an effort that reflects more than a year of collaborative work between the PRSS, NPR and American Public Media (APM).

The PRSS Audio Loudness Standard has been set at **-24 LUFS, \pm 2 LU, audio peaks < -3 dBTP**, meaning producers should strive to set their programs' audio levels at -24 Loudness Units Relative to Full Scale (LUFS), **with a deviation range of plus or minus two Loudness Units and an audio peak below -3 decibels.**

At some point in mid-2015, the PRSS Network Operations Center (NOC) will begin to monitor all program levels and will communicate with producers whose content does not meet the standard. PRSS officials hope that such a program of monitoring and communicating will be sufficient, and they plan to gauge the effectiveness of the program after it's been in place for a few months.

With the audio standard established, the PRSS, working with NPR, APM and Public Radio International (PRI), will now follow a two-track program. The first track involves educating the producer community on the existence of the standard, advising producers on how best to comply with the standard, and ensuring training resources and other communications are available. The second track involves monitoring the actual programs, both live streams and files, and working with those producers whose programs do not meet the standard.

PRSS Resources and Events on the Horizon

In the coming months, the PRSS will implement a communications campaign to ensure that producers and producing stations have information on the actual PRSS loudness standard, the implications of the standard for producers, a sampling of tested tools and resources available to help them comply, and opportunities to ask questions, request assistance and make comments.

The PRSS is also planning a webinar in late January 2015 and will invite all producers to participate. This event will be a chance for producers to receive an overview of the audio loudness standard, the requirements and implications for producers, and a preview of the resources that will be made available. There will also be ample time provided for questions and comments. When the date/time details of the webinar have been finalized, we will share them with you.

In the meantime, PRSS Director of Broadcast Operations Steve Densmore answered a few questions about the Loudness standard (see below). As always, questions or concerns can be communicated to the PRSS Help Desk at prsshelp@npr.org or 800.971.7677.

--

Why is the PRSS getting involved in Loudness now?

Steve Densmore: Looking at audio levels with respect to loudness has been around since the 1930's but our involvement started with John Kean from NPR Labs, who is an active member of the EBU PLOUD committee that's setting and refining loudness standards for broadcasters. Earlier this year, our colleague over at APM, Rob Byers, put together a chart showing their content varies over a fairly wide range when measured for loudness. That was followed up by a study of the entire Content Depot inventory done by Chris Nelson and Alice Goldfarb of NPR Labs showing a similar result.

Things certainly took flight this year when NPR CTO Marty Garrison, in response to feedback he had received from stations, tasked a group of us to look at the issue and decide whether the PRSS needed to be more involved. We sent out a survey this past summer to stations and producers, and we found an overwhelming percentage of stations do see this as a significant problem and that they do want us to do something about it.

Ultimately, we are committed to enhancing the listeners' experience when they are enjoying their favorite public radio programs. This manifests itself in numerous ways, but a very key one is that when you turn on your radio and set the volume at a comfortable level, you shouldn't have to change it. A very undesirable effect of not paying attention to loudness is listener fatigue and poor listener retention. That's not usually a problem in public radio, but it doesn't hurt to minimize the causes. Our hope is that by coming up with a standard, which we have, and communicating it to the producer and station communities, which we are now doing, we can achieve this goal.

How will the PRSS help the producer community comply with the standard?

We'll be of service in a couple ways. Over the next few months, the PRSS plans to publish and distribute information, training and guidance on the standard. This article serves as one of the first steps in this effort, and we will be making additional information available as well. This will include an FAQ for producers and stations, a list of hardware and software tools that will help producers monitor their programs' audio levels, and further information on the role that the PRSS will take in monitoring the loudness of the programs it distributes.

We're also planning to hold a webinar in January, aimed at giving producers and producing stations the opportunity to ask questions and drill down on any parts of the standard that they may be confused by. And we're looking at collaborating with some of our producer friends on a follow-up event in spring or early summer to provide more information about some of the audio tools that exist and the pros and cons of each.

And of course there is the actual monitoring of program audio, which we hope to begin mid-next year. For this, we plan to review each program file and stream that comes through the PRSS NOC to see where the audio levels are falling. If a particular program is more than minus 2 LUs off of the -24 LUFS benchmark we set, then we'll get in touch and let them know they're outside of the acceptable range. Our hope and assumption is that this will be enough.

After we've done this for six months to a year or so, we'll do a follow-up survey to see how it's working. This will be a very key step because it will be our way of measuring how effective the standard has been and how effective we have been in communicating it and helping producers comply with it.

Where will information on the loudness standard be stored? How can we access it?

We will soon set up a page on PRSS.org where all new information pieces and notices will be placed. The EsPRSSo newsletter will also spotlight any communications that come out of the PRSS. And we will send out system messages via ContentDepot messaging to make sure all important developments are distributed widely.

In the survey, you asked if the PRSS should take on the role of "fixing" audio levels if they don't meet the standard. Is this in the works?

At this point, we are not looking to make any changes to the content or alter any of the audio levels. As I said, our hope is that a strategy of "monitor and communicate" will be sufficient to make a real difference in program audio levels. If we do our follow-up survey and there's no perception of any improvement, then obviously we need to think about what we're doing and how we can make it work. But there are no plans right now to go beyond monitoring and communicating.

Will the listening audience notice any difference?

Well, we certainly hope so. But it's a funny question because ultimately what we hope is that listeners don't notice anything with regard to audio levels but instead are able to enjoy their favorite public radio programs without any distracting variances in volume.