

SUPERB OWL: KEEPING EYE ON FANS AND MORE?



[image: Eagle Owl by Johan J. Ingles-Le Nobel via flickr]

If humans could see the full spectrum of radiation, the San Francisco Bay Area shines bright like the sun this evening – not from lighting, but from communications. The Super Bowl concentrates more than 100,000 people, most of whom will have a wireless communications device on their person – cellphone, phablet, or tablet. There are numerous networks conveying information both on the field, the stands and to the fans watching globally on television and the internet.

And all of the communications generates massive amounts of data surely monitored in some way, no matter what our glorious government may tell us to the contrary. The Super Bowl is a National Special Security Event (NSSE), rated with a

Special Event Assignment Rating (SEAR) level 1. The designation ensures the advance planning and involvement of all the three-letter federal agencies responsible for intelligence and counterterrorism you can think of, as well as their state and local counterparts. They will be watching physical and electronic behavior closely.

Part of the advance preparation includes establishing a large no-fly zone around the Bay Area. Non-government drones will also be prohibited in this airspace.

What's not clear to the public: what measures have been taken to assure communications continuity in the same region? Yeah, yeah – we all know *they'll* be watching, but how many of the more than one million visitors to the Bay Area for the Super Bowl are aware of the unsolved 15 or 16 telecom cable cuts that happened over the last couple of years? What percentage of local residents have paid or are paying any attention at all to telecommunications infrastructure, or whether crews “working” on infrastructure are legitimate or not?

Planning for a SEAR 1 event begins almost as soon as the venue is announced – perhaps even earlier. In the case of Super Bowl 50, planning began at least as early as the date the game was announced nearly 34 months ago on March 28th, 2014. The Levi's stadium was still under construction as late as August that same year.

And the first cable cut event happened nearly a year earlier, on April 16, 2013 – six months after Levi's Stadium was declared one of two finalists to host the 50th Super Bowl, and one month before Levi's was awarded the slot by NFL owners.

News about a series of 11 cable cuts drew national attention last summer when the FBI asked for the public's assistance. These events happened to the east of San Francisco Bay though some of them are surely inside the 32-mile

radius no-fly zone observed this evening.

But what about the other cuts which took place after April 2013, and after the last of 11 cuts in June 2015? News reports vary but refer to a total of 15 or 16 cuts about which law enforcement has insufficient information to charge anyone with vandalism or worse. A report last month quotes an FBI spokesperson saying there were 15 attacks against fiber optic cable since 2014. Based on the date, the number of cuts excludes the first event from April 2013, suggesting an additional four cuts have occurred since June 2015.

Where did these cuts occur? Were they located inside tonight's no-fly zone? Will any disruption to communications services be noticed this evening, when so many users are flooding telecommunications infrastructure? Will residents and visitors alike even notice any unusual technicians at work if there is any disruption?

Keep your eyes peeled, football fans.