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Features

'New TV'

Super high frequency could replace cable with on-air signals

United Press International
NEW YORK — The scramble for expensive cable television rights going on across the country has obscured the fact that, for 10 years now, a cheaper alternative has been available.

It is the multipoint distribution service (MPS), a super-high frequency, line-of-sight, microwave signal authorized by the Federal Communications Commission a decade ago but little used up to now.

In its present application through local systems set up in about 50 cities, it delivers various types of pay

TV programs over the air instead of by cable. But it is different from conventional over-the-air pay TV, which uses the broadcast band.

Equipment for MDS is made by several companies, including Electronics, Missiles & Communications, Inc. (EMC), of White Haven, Pa.

President Frank Misso of EMC says MDS is a less expensive way of transmitting pay TV programs than cable.

The local distributor of pay TV programs by MDS makes a one-time investment of \$500,000 to \$1 million

in equipment, which he rents out to the users, collecting fees for the use and fees for the programs.

The microwave programs are distributed locally at the relatively modest transmission cost of microwave compared with \$14,000 to \$25,000 a mile for cable TV transmission. This can run to \$20 million or more in many communities.

So far, MDS has not resulted in any significant new programming, according to Don Franco, head of Microband Corp. of America, New York, which has built up a series of franchised MDS systems in 50 cities.

Franco said these systems are common carriers providing supplemental and alternative delivery of programs from such established pay TV program production and distribution firms as Home Box Office, Showtime and others.

The system uses satellite ground stations and other facilities to take the programs from the conventional distribution channels for local transmission on the super microwave band.

Franco said most of the system's customers are homeowners in areas where there is no cable TV or where

cable service is not well developed. The home owner pays an installation fee of \$100 and a monthly fee of \$13.50 to \$15 for service. The program packages are the same as those delivered on the more comprehensive cable systems.

MDS and Microband have started to develop new uses for the system. In addition to picking up conventional pay TV programs, the local studio can originate special programs by means of tapes or films or through an electronic data processing terminal in the case of business

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NASA plans 15 launches besides Columbia in 1981

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's highest priority in 1981 is to launch the space shuttle Columbia on its first test flight, but it also has 15 unmanned satellite launchings on the year's schedule. All but two will use expendable rockets that the shuttle is designed to replace.

Eleven of the satellites will be fired into eastward orbits from Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral, Fla., and four will go into north-south orbit from California's Vandenberg Air Force Base.

Only two of the unmanned missions are NASA scientific projects. The other 13 satellites are owned by other government agencies and commercial enterprises. NASA will be paid for launch costs.

The shuttle is undergoing preparations at Canaveral for launch March 17 on the first of four test orbital flights before the reusable rocket plane will be declared fully ready.

NASA plans to begin phasing out its one-use-only rockets in 1983.

The first 1981 Canaveral launch, Feb. 19, is a commercial COMSTAR communications satellite owned by the Comsat General Corp., on an Atlas-Centaur rocket.

Two others are set in March. An Intelsat 5 International Telecommunications Satellite Corp. communications satellite will be launched on an Atlas-Centaur and a government weather satellite will go up on a smaller Delta.

A Navy navigational satellite is to be orbited in April from Vandenberg on a Scout and a Delta will orbit a Satellite Business Systems communications satellite the same month from Florida.

Another National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration weather satellite is to be orbited in May, by an Atlas from California.

Three June communications satellites missions are scheduled. One owned by the Defense Depart-

ment will be on an Atlas-Centaur, one, owned by the RCA Corp., will be on a Delta, and another Intelsat will be on an Atlas-Centaur.

NASA's first scientific satellite, an Explorer class spacecraft, designed to investigate the interaction between Earth's magnetic field and the ionosphere.

Another Explorer will be launched in September from the West Coast to study variations in ultraviolet radiation from the sun and how they affect the Earth's ozone.

A communication satellite is on tap for September launch for Intelsat on an Atlas-Centaur, and another Intelsat is to go up in December on an Atlas-Centaur.

Another RCA satellite will be launched in October on a Delta and another Intelsat is to go up in December on an Atlas-Centaur.

NASA launched seven satellites in 1980, six successfully.

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