



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 11, 2002

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FCC BEGINS INQUIRY REGARDING ADDITIONAL SPECTRUM FOR UNLICENSED DEVICES

As part of the ongoing effort to promote efficient use of spectrum, the FCC today asked for public comment on the possibility of permitting unlicensed transmitters to operate in additional frequency bands. Such changes could allow the development of new and innovative types of unlicensed devices. This inquiry examines new and creative ways to utilize the spectrum resource more efficiently by considering new spectral frontiers for unlicensed use.

In a Notice of Inquiry approved today, the Commission stated that the current rules for unlicensed transmitters have been a tremendous success. A wide variety of devices have been developed and introduced under those rules for consumer and business use, including cordless telephones, home security systems, electronic toys, anti-pilfering and inventory control systems, and computer wireless local area networks. The success of those rules shows that there could be significant benefits to the economy, businesses and consumers in making additional spectrum available for unlicensed transmitters. Unlicensed transmitters may be operated under the provisions of Part 15 of the Commission's Rules. Part 15 transmitters generally operate on frequencies shared with authorized services at relatively low power, levels and must operate on a non-interference basis.

The Notice seeks comments on whether unlicensed operations should be permitted in additional frequency bands. Specifically, it seeks comments on the feasibility of allowing unlicensed devices to operate in the TV broadcast spectrum and locations and times when spectrum is not being used. It also seeks comment on the feasibility of permitting unlicensed devices to operate in other bands, such as the 3650-3700 MHz band, at power levels higher than other unlicensed transmitters with only the minimal technical requirements necessary to prevent interference to licensed services.

The Commission noted that there have been significant advances in technology that may make it feasible to design new types of unlicensed devices that are able to share spectrum in the TV bands without causing interference to licensed services operating in those bands. Advances in computer technology make it possible to design equipment that could monitor the spectrum to detect frequencies already in use and ensure that transmissions only occur on open frequencies. The low cost of GPS equipment could allow a device to determine its location and use information from a database to determine whether there are any licensed operations in its vicinity. Equipment can be designed that is frequency agile, with the capability of changing frequency as needed to avoid interference to licensed users.

Action by the Commission December 11, 2002 by Notice of Inquiry (FCC 02-328). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy and Copps, with Commissioner Martin approving in part and dissenting in part, Commissioner Adelstein not participating and Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin issuing separate statements.

OET Docket No. 02-380

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