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FCC Proposes Giving Signal Boosters a Boost to Dismay of Cellular Industry

by Ina Fried
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The Federal Communications Commission has [proposed allowing broader use of signal boosters](#) that can be used to improve in-building cellular coverage, much to the dismay of the wireless carriers.

Unlike a carrier-favored approach, [known as femtocells](#), signal boosters work with all flavors of cell signal as opposed to a single network. However, the industry says that improperly designed gear can lead to signal oscillation, which can cause interference.



In a statement, FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn said the devices can help address an important issue with regard to service gaps, while ensuring they don't cause interference.

"These devices have demonstrated they can help address the coverage gaps that exist within the wireless service areas in both rural and urban environments," Clyburn said.

Clyburn praised his commission for working with the cellular industry and the makers of the gear to come up with rules that should help minimize the chance of interference. Among the proposed rules is one that would require devices to shut themselves down if they are operating outside of technical guidelines.

However, the cell industry says it is still worried about interference.

“While we have yet to read the (proposed guidelines), we remain concerned that poorly manufactured or improperly installed boosters can do much more harm than good for both consumers and public safety officials,” Brian Josef, CTIA vice president of regulatory affairs, said in a statement. “The record is full of examples of such harm. One of the leading advocates for changes in the commission’s rules, who also happen to be one of the leading manufacturers of boosters, has marketed and sold devices that have caused significant harmful interference.”

Sellers of such gear, meanwhile, applauded the ruling.

“In short, the FCC is formalizing what most of us have known all along: cellular coverage is not good enough,” The Repeater Store [said in a blog posting](#). “In the modern age we are ever more reliant on our phones for important calls and increasingly data services. The FCC recognizes that the task of providing this service cannot fall on the carriers alone and is moving to make cellular signal boosters part of the solution.”

Lloyd R. Meese, CEO of Wi-Ex, which makes such a booster, praised the move, noting his company’s gear already complies with the proposed regulations.

“We recognized from the beginning that oscillation could be an issue and developed patented technology as a solution to the problem,” Meese said in a statement.

In a [blog post](#), AT&T expressed hope that the new proposal would at least clarify the rules and make it easier to go after offending equipment.

This action comes in addition to a separate move by the commission to [require carriers to allow data roaming](#) of rivals onto their networks at terms set by the commission. Verizon and AT&T had opposed that move, though Sprint praised the decision.