



## FCC Tweaks Cell Signal Ruling; Manufacturers React

FCC now says wireless carriers must contact consumers with existing cell signal boosters but still requires new purchasers to register. Either way, manufacturers still applaud the new regulation.



By Jason Knott, February 26, 2013

While some media are interpreting the recent FCC ruling on cell phone signal boosters as a negative regulation because it would have forced as many as two million consumers to contact their cell service providers for permission to use their existing signal boosters, manufacturers of the devices that specifically serve the custom electronics industry are unanimously backing the decision.

In a nutshell, the [ruling tightens the technology of the devices](#) and the way they pass signals to the towers so the boosters cannot interfere with wireless networks, including emergency 911 calls. The new rules were necessary because cell phone signal boosters are becoming more and more necessary.

According to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 72 percent of cell owners experience dropped calls at least occasionally. In addition, the study found 77 percent of cell phone Internet users experience slow download speeds that prevent data from loading as quickly as they would prefer. Add to that the fact that an increasing number of U.S. households are dropping landlines and going only cellular.

Cell phone boosters do exactly as the name would suggest. They are radio frequency amplifiers that increase incoming (receive) signal and outgoing (transmit) cell and mobile phone signal to provide a clear reliable voice connection, reduced dropped calls and increased data speeds. They are also known as cellular phone amps, amplifiers and repeaters. Boosters can be used to increase the range of a cell phone, smartphone, datacard, aircard and other cellular and PCS frequency band devices such as a remote alarm, vehicle tracking device and video device.

The [technology has been a boon to integrators](#) that have jumped into the category. One CE Pro 100 integrator reported at the 2012 CE Pro 100 Summit that he routinely earns a highly profitable \$600 for installing cell signal boosters for his clients.

## **FCC Tweaks Wording**

Since the initial ruling was announced, the FCC has already tweaked some language on the FAQ portion of its website regarding the law. The FCC originally declared:

“Absent your provider’s permission, you may not continue using your booster.”

But after consumer advocates vocally spoke out saying it was onerous to put the burden of contact on the consumer, the website now says, “If a wireless provider or the FCC asks you to turn off your signal booster because it is causing interference to a wireless network, you must turn off your booster and leave it off until the interference problem can be resolved. When the new rules go into effect, you will be able to purchase a booster with additional safeguards that protect wireless networks from interference.”

However, purchases of new devices must still register their device with their wireless provider and have their provider’s consent. The registration requirement is still being pooh-poohed by consumers.

## **Manufacturers React Positively**

“Since we have always used technology to protect the provider’s network, today’s FCC Report and Order validates our technology and products and encourages us to continue research and investment in the area of enhancing the cell phone signal,” says Karen Reynolds CEO and president of Atlanta-based [Wi-Ex](#), makers of the zBoost.

She adds that the ruling and the new supporting statements from the FCC remove “consumer and industry uncertainty regarding signal booster use and operation,” noting it “will promote further investment in and use of this promising technology. Signal boosters not only help consumers improve coverage where signal strength is weak, but they also aid public safety first responders by extending wireless access in hard-to serve areas such as tunnels, subways, and garages. This Report and Order reflects a common sense, consensus-based technical solution that will help millions of consumers across the country.”

Likewise, SmoothTalker based in Aurora, Ont., Canada says its device fully complies with the rules and standards using its proprietary Stealth Tech technology.

Tom Vagenas, SmoothTalker CEO, says, “While others scramble to figure out how they will be able to create products which can meet the new stringent FCC policies, SmoothTalker Stealth Tech Amps are already fully compliant with the new FCC rules.”

According to the company, the Stealth Tech amplifiers and boosters employ all the necessary safeguards to prevent any unwanted network interference. In addition SmoothTalker boosters pass all signal quality requirements as stated in the engineering standards for 2G, 3G and 4G forward and reverse signals.

Specifically, the company says it complies with the technical regs for self-monitoring, anti-oscillation, gain control and powering down when approaching a cell tower found in the new FCC Section 13-21.

Meanwhile, despite being opposed to the registration requirement for consumers, Wilson Electronics’ COO Joe Banos called the ruling “a major victory not only for our industry, but also for the end users who benefit from added levels of safety, security and satisfaction with their service through the use of signal boosters. We realize the issue of third-party signal boosters operating under cellular carriers’ licenses is complex, and we commend the FCC, its Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and all the parties that assisted in developing the approved standards and finding a solution to an issue that once seemed insurmountable.”