



FCC Adds Rules for Consumer Cellular Signal Boosters

By Jeremy J. Glowacki February 20, 2013

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted a Report and Order that furthers the goal of improving the U.S. wireless infrastructure by expanding the reach of wireless coverage for consumers. These new rules governing signal boosters, which amplify signals between wireless devices and wireless networks, are intended to substantially improve signal booster design by requiring manufacturers to include safeguards that protect wireless networks.

All four nationwide carriers, as well as many rural and regional carriers, have consented to the use of boosters on their networks, as long as those boosters meet the technical specifications outlined in the Order.

Wilson Electronics, a manufacturer of cell phone boosters, played an active role in the development of the FCC's certification specifications. The company issued a statement applauding their final adoption, because they "will eliminate poorly designed products that currently plague the market, and have been a source of cell site interference."

"Today's outcome is 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," Wilson COO Joe Banos, stated. "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."

Wilson also recognized the leadership provided by Verizon Wireless, T-Mobile, Sprint, and AT&T, and said it looks forward to reaching out to the remaining carriers as they adopt the industry's position.

Wi-Ex a provider of cell phone signal booster kits, also commented on the ruling. "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," said Karen Reynolds CEO and president of Wi-Ex. "With millions of boosters already enhancing the provider's signal for municipal, state and federal governments, military installations, security agencies, businesses, healthcare facilities and most importantly consumers, with our zBoost products we see firsthand the positive impact of cell phone signal boosters for consumers and businesses."

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.

The Order addresses two classes of signal boosters—consumer and industrial—with distinct regulatory requirements for each. Specifically, consumer signal boosters must meet stringent technical specifications (Network Protection Standard), and are authorized under provider licenses subject to provider consent, voluntarily provided in this case by most carriers. Consumers must register their signal booster with their provider prior to use. Labeling requirements ensure that consumers understand these terms of use.

Consumer boosters can be used on most mainstream wireless bands: cellular, PCS, AWS-1, 700 MHz, and ESMR (after rebanding). The use of consumer boosters may not cause interference to wireless networks even if a device meets the Network Protection Standard.

The Order also details rules for industrial signal boosters designed to cover large areas such as stadiums, airports, and tunnels. Industrial signal boosters will continue to fall under the existing authorization process, and must be installed and operated in coordination with licensees.