

InfoComm Comments on FCC White Spaces Decision

On November 4, 2008, the FCC approved the use of the "white spaces" - the TV channels that are not actually occupied by a broadcast station - to deliver wireless broadband internet and other services to consumer wireless devices. It is important to note that this ruling does not address the issue of wireless microphone operations in the 700 MHz band. The FCC had proposed earlier that wireless microphone operations in the 700 MHz band should cease in February 2009, but a final transition date has not been announced.

Specific details regarding the TV channels that may be set aside for wireless microphone operation in each market, geolocation capability, database access, spectrum-sensing technology, device approval standards, and other technical information will not be available until the full text of the ruling is released, which is expected to occur next month.

Despite a lack of such details, the official FCC press release and published comments from individual FCC Commissioners indicate that the ruling will allow Fixed and Personal/Portable unlicensed consumer wireless devices to operate in the television bands after passing FCC certification tests.

The press release states that "Wireless microphones will be protected in a variety of ways." White space devices "must include a geolocation capability" and be able to access an online database that will tell the white space device what spectrum may be used at that location. "The locations where wireless microphones are used, such as sporting venues and event and production facilities, can be registered in the database and will be protected in the same way as other services."

Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate stated that the requirement to use the database will ensure that "venues such as sports stadiums and theatres may register their locations and receive complete protection."

The FCC press release notes that the Fixed and Personal/Portable unlicensed devices must include the geolocation capability "in addition to spectrum-sensing technology." Specifically, "The Commission also has required that devices include the ability to listen to the airwaves to sense wireless microphones as an additional measure of protection for these devices."

In his individual comments, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin noted, "Prior to going to market any white space device will undergo a rigorous certification process. Today's item protects broadcasters' operations. It also protects entertainment, sports and other significant venues, including the unlicensed operation of many wireless microphones and other wireless devices in those areas. Additionally, channels have even been set aside to protect wireless microphones in major markets."

InfoComm will continue to advocate on behalf of manufacturers, dealers and users of our wireless products as they adapt to changing operating conditions resulting from the

gradual deployment of new wireless devices. We will pass along the details of the "white spaces" ruling as soon as the full text is released.