

Background

Whether or not something is “too loud” is a judgment that varies with each listener. The decision is influenced by many factors like content and style, the speaker’s voice and tone, background sounds and music.

Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) rules will soon require commercials to have the same average volume as the programs they accompany. In the Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation (CALM) Act (www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ311/pdf/PLAW-111publ311.pdf), Congress directed the FCC to establish these rules, and they will go into effect on December 13, 2012.

Equipment That Helps

Many television receivers are now equipped with circuits that are designed to stabilize loudness differences between programs and commercials. These functions usually need to be “enabled” or turned on through the television receiver’s “Set up/Audio” menu. The “Mute” button on TV remote controls is also useful to “blank” excessively loud audio. Manually controlling volume levels with the remote control remains the simplest approach to reducing excessive volume levels. In “high-end” equipment, such as home theater systems, some automatic devices may also help. They include:

- **Automatic Gain Control (AGC) Circuits** raise the audio level if it is too low, and lower it if it is too high.
- **Audio Compressors** can tone down loud sounds. Compressors can be adjusted to eliminate many of the negative effects of loudness.

Equipment That Helps (cont’d.)

- **Limiters** can keep the audio level from exceeding a pre-determined level.
- **Audio Expanders** increase the range of sound. An expander can restore sound to its normal range and also reduce noticeable background noise.
- **Audio Filters** can “screen out” specific audio frequencies.

What the rules will do

Beginning on December 13, 2012, the FCC’s new rules will require TV stations, cable operators, satellite TV providers and other pay TV providers to limit a commercial’s average volume to the same average volume as the programming it accompanies. A commercial may have louder and quieter moments, but overall it will be no louder than surrounding programming.

(More)



If You Have a Complaint

Once the rules are in effect, when sending your complaint to the FCC, please include the time, channel, a description of the commercial, whether you are watching pay TV or broadcast television using an antenna, and your contact information. You can file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Call Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY. Your complaint can also be faxed to 1-866-418-0232, or mailed to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

For More Information

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau website at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice; 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, visit www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts.

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