

FCC Consumer Advisory

Using Wireless Devices on Airplanes

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules prohibit the use of cellular phones using the 800 MHz frequency and other wireless devices on airborne aircraft. This ban was put in place because of potential interference to wireless networks on the ground.

In March 2007, the FCC terminated a proceeding that it began in late 2004 to consider potentially lifting this ban. The FCC determined that the technical information provided by interested parties in response to the proposal was insufficient to determine whether in-flight use of wireless devices on aircraft could cause harmful interference to wireless networks on the ground. Therefore, it decided at this time to make no changes in the rules prohibiting in-flight use of such devices.

In addition to the FCC's rules, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prohibits in-flight use of wireless devices because of potential interference to the aircraft's navigation and communication systems. For this same reason the FAA also regulates the use of all portable electronic devices (PEDs), such as iPods and portable DVD players, during flight.

The FCC has approved rules that allow in-flight voice and data services, including broadband services using dedicated air-to-ground frequencies that were previously used for seat-back telephone service. Air-to-ground service providers are in the process of rolling out new in-flight services, such as high-speed Internet access for laptop computers. Because these services will operate in frequencies that are dedicated to air-to-ground communications and are separate from those used for wireless services on the ground, they do not pose an interference risk to wireless networks on the ground. Providers of in-flight wireless broadband and other communications services using the air-to-ground frequencies must coordinate with airlines and comply with any FAA rules in order to offer such services.

For further information on use of personal wireless devices on airplanes, 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:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiry and Complaints Division
455 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.

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