

Hearing Aid Compatibility for Wireline Telephones

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

The Hearing Aid Compatibility Act of 1988 (HAC Act) requires that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ensure that **all** telephones manufactured or imported for use in the United States after August 1989, and all “essential” telephones, are hearing aid-compatible. “Essential” telephones are defined as “coin-operated telephones, telephones provided for emergency use and other telephones frequently needed for use by persons using such hearing aids.” “Essential” phones might include workplace phones, phones in confined settings (like hospitals and nursing homes), and phones in hotel and motel rooms. Secure phones (approved by the U.S. Government to transmit classified or sensitive conversations) and phones used with public mobile and private radio services are exempt from the HAC Act.

What Makes a Telephone Hearing Aid Compatible?

Hearing aids operate in one of two modes – acoustic coupling or telecoil coupling. Hearing aids operating in acoustic coupling mode receive and amplify all sounds surrounding the user; both desired sounds, such as a telephone’s audio signal, as well as unwanted ambient noise. Hearing aids operating in telecoil coupling mode avoid unwanted ambient noise by turning off the microphone and receiving only signals from magnetic fields generated by telecoil-compatible telephones. In the United States, about 60 percent of hearing aids contain telecoils, which generally are used by individuals with profound hearing loss.

A telecoil is a small, tightly-wrapped piece of wire inside the hearing aid that, when activated, picks up the voice signal from the electromagnetic field that leaks from compatible telephones. While the microphone on a hearing aid picks up all sounds, the telecoil will only pick up an electromagnetic signal from the telephone. Thus, users of telecoil-equipped hearing aids are able to communicate effectively over the telephone without feedback and without the amplification

What Makes a Telephone Hearing Aid Compatible? (cont’d.)

of unwanted background noise. Telecoils can only fit in two styles of hearing aids: “In-The-Ear” and “Behind-The-Ear” aids. Most smaller hearing aids are not large enough to fit the telecoil.

Many people report feedback (or squealing) when they place the handset of the telephone next to their hearing aid. When placed correctly, telecoils can eliminate this feedback because the hearing aid microphone is turned off and the hearing aid only amplifies the signal coming through the telecoil. Some hearing-aid users may need to place the ear-piece slightly behind the ear rather than directly over the ear to obtain the clearest signal.

A telephone that is hearing aid compatible has an internal feature that allows the use of telephone compatible hearing aids. Thus, telephones can be used effectively by persons with hearing aids.

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What Are the FCC's Requirements for Hearing Aid Compatibility for Wireline Telephones?

FCC rules require that phones subject to the HAC Act: (1) produce a magnetic field of sufficient strength and quality to permit coupling with hearing aids that contain telecoils; and (2) provide an adequate range of volume. FCC rules also establish technical parameters to ensure that telephones are compatible with hearing aids.

FCC rules also generally require that telephones allow volume to be increased to accommodate individuals with hearing disabilities whether or not they use hearing aids. Telephones allowing high volume levels must automatically reset to a lower volume each time the handset is returned to an on-hook condition. Telephone equipment manufacturers may request a waiver permitting high volume telephones to remain at the high volume setting under certain conditions. If you need a volume higher than the 18 decibel (dB) volume limit specified in the FCC's rules, you must reset the volume each time you use the telephone, even when you are the primary user of the telephone.

Are There Labeling Requirements?

Telephone manufacturers are required to clearly label their telephones and the telephone packaging containing hearing aid-compatible handsets. They must also make information available in the package or product manual, and require service providers to make the performance ratings of hearing aid-compatible telephones available.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have a problem using a hearing aid with a wireline telephone that is supposed to be hearing aid-compatible, first try to resolve the matter with the equipment manufacturer or your wireline service provider. If you are unable to resolve the matter directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint. You can file your complaint using an FCC online complaint form found at www.fcc.gov/complaints. You can

Filing a Complaint with the FCC (cont'd.)

also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 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 Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to thoroughly complete the online complaint form. When you open the online form, you will be asked a series of questions that will take you to the particular section of the form you need to complete. If you do not use the online complaint form, your complaint should at least indicate:

- your name, address, email address and phone number where you can be reached;
- whether you are filing a complaint on behalf of another party, and if so, the party's name, address, email address, day time phone number and your relationship to the party;
- preferred format or method of response (letter, fax, voice phone call, email, TRS, TTY, ASCII text, audio recording or Braille);
- that your complaint is about hearing aid compatibility for a wireline telephone;
- the make and model number of the equipment or device you are complaining about;
- the name, address and telephone number (if known) of the company or companies involved in your complaint; and
- a brief description of your complaint and the resolution you are seeking, and a full description of the equipment or service you are complaining about, including date of purchase, use or attempt to use.

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For More Information

For information about hearing aid compatible wireless telephones, see the FCC's consumer guide at www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/hac_wireless.html. For information about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office website at www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro. Finally, for information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau website at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.

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