



Telecom

FCC Schedules 'White Space' Wi-Fi Spectrum Proposal Vote

By Staff Writer | September 14, 2010



[Satellite TODAY 09-14-10] The **U.S. Federal Communications Commission** (FCC) has scheduled a Sept. 23 vote to determine if it will open up vacant television spectrum for wireless broadband use,

The vote follows a two-year-old FCC proposal to make these airwaves, known as "white spaces," available for free without specific permission – similar to the way Wi-Fi and Bluetooth spectrum is used. The FCC plan would require installers to configure devices to detect and utilize a frequency that's vacant in their area. A GPS technology database would be used to help the devices determine the appropriate white space frequencies.

In a statement, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said that allowing the spectrum to be used for wireless broadband would result in "super Wi-Fi" technology and a boost for the electronics markets. "We're hoping history will repeat itself. White spaces are a big deal for consumers and for investment and innovation."

The broadcast industry, however, has fought the proposal with concerns over interference caused by wireless microphones and other similar technologies. The FCC said it has been working to alleviate concerns with the proposal's supporters and critics to map TV channels across the country. The agency also plans to save at least two channels for minor users of wireless microphones, while placing major wireless microphone users in the white space database, so the automated devices avoid their airwaves.

Technology companies such as **Google**, **Microsoft** and **Dell** support the FCC's proposal, claiming that white spaces are suited to provide broadband because their signals can penetrate walls, utilize a surplus of network capacity, cover large areas and deliver Internet speeds ranging from 15 to 20 megabits per second. The FCC's supporters also said the spectrum could be used to bring high-speed Internet access to remote areas where terrestrial options aren't available.

Rice University Professor Edward Knightly, the FCC's appointed principal investigator on a white space project, said that the use of white space should eliminate many of the problems related to spotty Wi-Fi coverage. "As many Wi-Fi users know, you don't have to move very far before you drop out of a hot spot. Low-frequency TV signals are different. One more wall or one more tree is not going to push you beyond the reach of the network. That's why rabbit-ear antennas served most of the country quite well before cable and satellite came to dominate the market."

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