



Position Statement
Use of Cellphone Silencers

May 10, 2001

Industry Canada has called for public comment on the liberalized use of cell phone silencers. The widespread use of these devices, commonly referred to as jammers, is currently prohibited in Canada as well as in the vast majority of industrialized nations. In Canada, only law enforcement agencies are permitted the occasional use of jamming devices for civil defence purposes.

More and more Canadians are taking advantage of the benefits offered by wireless phones and other wireless devices. The rapid adoption of wireless communications in Canada, and indeed worldwide, has raised a number of issues in terms of acceptable social behaviour and appropriate responses to unacceptable behaviour. Never before in our experience have we had a phone that can go to the cinema, in the street, into a café, or lecture hall. Over time, Canadian society will develop behaviour to accommodate this new technology, as it has with many other new technologies.

The costs and risks associated with the use of jammers would be significant. The use of the technology would:

- interfere with emergency and public safety communications, including the three million calls a year to 9-1-1 or other emergency numbers.
- provide an opportunity for anti-competitive and discriminatory practices.
- have the potential to block service outside of the target area.

Each of these risks carries a burden of legal liability. Widespread use would eventually create false perceptions regarding the reliability and performance of wireless networks, increasing costs for carriers and consumers alike. It is also far from clear that liberalizing the use of jammers will accomplish what Industry Canada wishes to achieve.

The cumulative effects of these impacts would impede the development of radiocommunication and telecommunication systems, reduce the efficiency of spectrum use, and reduce the quality of telecommunications services available to Canadians – directly contrary to the fundamental communications policy objectives of the Government of Canada.

The Canadian wireless industry believes that the vast majority of our customers are sensitive to those around them and act accordingly. In most instances, the ringing of phones or pagers is simply the result of forgetting to turn them off or setting the handset to silent notification, and not of a disregard for others.

The CWTA is of the view that in raising public awareness and promoting the courteous use of wireless phones and pagers, the approach the industry has taken adequately balances the rights and needs of all Canadians, including users and non-users, as well as licensed spectrum holders. So far, the reaction to our efforts has been positive and as an industry, we are working with other groups to further deliver the "Cell Savvy" message.

It is the position of the CWTA that the current prohibition on the use of cellphone silencers should remain. Under certain circumstances, law enforcement and national security agencies have been granted authorizations by Industry Canada to use these devices. CWTA recognizes the unique status of these agencies and does not oppose this type of special authorization, however CWTA unequivocally opposes more widespread use or authorization of these devices.

The most reasonable public policy decision is to maintain Industry Canada's current policy regarding jammers and allow society to adapt behaviour to accommodate this new technology.

The Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association (CWTA) is the authority on wireless issues, developments and trends in Canada. It represents cellular, PCS, paging, mobile radio, fixed wireless and mobile satellite carriers as well as companies that develop and produce products and services for the industry.

For media information and interview opportunities, contact:
Marc Choma, Director of Communications, CWTA
(613) 233-4888 ext. 107
mchoma@cwta.ca