

## Interception and Divulgence of Radio Communications

Federal and state laws make intercepting and divulging radio communications illegal and punishable by severe criminal penalties, with certain exceptions.

### What kinds of interception and divulgence of radio transmissions are legal?

The FCC and the Communications Act do not forbid certain types of interception and disclosure of radio communications, including:

- Mere interception of radio communications, such as overhearing your neighbor's conversation over a cordless telephone, or listening to emergency service reports on a radio scanner (although intercepting and/or recording telephone-related radio communications may be a violation of other federal or state laws).
- Divulgence of certain radio communications that were transmitted for use by the general public (such as over-the-air radio and television broadcasts).
- Divulgence of broadcasts related to ships, aircraft, vehicles or persons in distress.
- Divulgence of transmissions by amateur radio or citizen band radio operators.

### What kinds of interception and divulgence are prohibited?

Section 705 of the Communications Act prohibits a person from using an intercepted radio communication for his or her own benefit. Examples of this include:

- A taxicab company intercepting radio communications between dispatchers and drivers of a rival taxicab company in order to gain competitive advantages.
- Unauthorized interception of signals from pay television services, such as cable or satellite television.
- A person selling or publishing a recording or contents of someone else's wireless phone conversation.

### What about equipment used to intercept radio communications?

The Communications Act prohibits the FCC from authorizing radio scanning equipment that:

- Can receive transmissions in the frequencies allocated to domestic cellular services.
- Can readily be altered by the user to intercept cellular communications.
- May be equipped with decoders that convert digital transmissions to analog voice audio.

It is illegal to manufacture, import, sell or lease such unauthorized equipment in the United States.

### Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>

- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

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

### Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

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Last Reviewed 1/22/15

