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ENTELEC
Washington Report

FCC Releases 800 MHz Vacated Channel Search Engine

The FCC has released a Public Notice announcing the availability of a new search engine that will enable public safety and critical infrastructure industry (“CII”) entities, frequency coordinators, and the public to identify channels in the 809-815/854-860 MHz band vacated by Sprint Nextel and similar companies as part of 800 MHz rebanding. The vacated spectrum will be made available for licensing to public safety and CII eligible entities.

Initially, the search engine will be populated with data regarding Sprint’s relinquished channel holdings in the 809-809.5/854-854.5 MHz band segment in non-border regions. As Sprint relinquishes additional channels, updated channel availability information will be uploaded into the search engine.

While the Commission’s Public Notice announced the availability of the search engine, it did not authorize the filing of applications for vacated channels. The Commission is expected to release additional public notices that will announce application procedures for specific channels, including identifying the channels by region and frequency range.

The additional public notices and application procedures will likely be announced upon completion of rebanding. Available channels will be available exclusively for licensing to public safety entities for three years, and to public safety and CII entities for an additional two years.

In addition, the FCC prohibits other entities from relocating existing stations into vacated areas during the exclusive licensing period. Not only is this important for CII entities such as oil and gas companies and electric utilities, it is a critical consideration for companies purchasing existing 800 MHz channels on the secondary market, as it could prevent full use of the channels.

The search engine is available here.

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FCC Keeps Site-Based Licensing For 900 MHz Band

The FCC has released a Report and Order retaining site-based licensing for the 199 channels allocated to the Business/Industrial Land Transportation (“B/ILT”) 900 MHz band (896-901/935-940 MHz), rejecting a previous proposal to auction unused spectrum in the band. The Report and Order leaves the current rules for B/ILT 900 MHz band users largely intact, although the FCC does implement new interference protection standards for operations in the band and addresses the licensing freeze in place since September 2004.

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In September 2004, the Commission imposed a freeze on the filing of applications for new 900 MHz B/ILT licenses. Although the Report and Order does not alter the freeze, it does provide a timetable by which the freeze will be lifted. Specifically, the freeze will be lifted in a National Public Safety Planning Advisory Committee (“NPSPAC”) region six months after 800 MHz rebanding is complete in that particular region. The 800 MHz rebanding process has not yet been completed in any NPSPAC region. The FCC will release Public Notices as the dates the freeze will be lifted are set.

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