



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

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FCC ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY

WARNING: Wi-Fi Blocking is Prohibited

Persons or Businesses Causing Intentional Interference to Wi-Fi Hot Spots Are Subject to Enforcement Action

In the 21st Century, Wi-Fi represents an essential on-ramp to the Internet. Personal Wi-Fi networks, or “hot spots,” are an important way that consumers connect to the Internet. Willful or malicious interference with Wi-Fi hot spots is illegal. Wi-Fi blocking violates Section 333 of the Communications Act, as amended.¹ The Enforcement Bureau has seen a disturbing trend in which hotels and other commercial establishments block wireless consumers from using their own personal Wi-Fi hot spots on the commercial establishment’s premises. As a result, the Bureau is protecting consumers by aggressively investigating and acting against such unlawful intentional interference.

In 2014, the Enforcement Bureau conducted an investigation, culminating with a Consent Decree, into this kind of unlawful activity by the operator of a resort hotel and convention center.² In that case, Marriott International, Inc. deployed a Wi-Fi deauthentication protocol to deliberately block consumers who sought to connect to the Internet using their own personal Wi-Fi hot spots. Marriott admitted that the customers it blocked did not pose a security threat

¹ 47 U.S.C. § 333.

² *Marriott Int’l, Inc.; Marriott Hotel Servs, Inc.*, Order and Consent Decree, 29 FCC Rcd 11760 (Enf. Bur. 2014). Marriott and other members of the hotel and lodging industry filed a petition requesting guidance on this issue. See Petition of Am. Hotel & Lodging Ass’n, Marriott Int’l, Inc., and Ryman Hospitality Props. for a Declaratory Ruling to Interpret 47 U.S.C. § 333, or, in the Alternative, for Rulemaking, RM-11737 (filed Aug. 25, 2014) (Petition). Comment was sought on the Petition. *Consumer & Gov’t Affairs Bureau Reference Information Center Petition for Rulemaking Filed*, Public Notice, RM 11737 (Nov. 19, 2014). While the Enforcement Bureau recognizes that the Petition questions our position, the Bureau will continue to enforce the law as it understands it unless and until the Commission determines otherwise.

to the Marriott network and agreed to settle the investigation by paying a civil penalty of \$600,000.

Following the settlement, the Enforcement Bureau has received several complaints that other commercial Wi-Fi network operators may be disrupting the legitimate operation of personal Wi-Fi hot spots. The Bureau is investigating such complaints and will take appropriate action against violators.

What is Prohibited? No hotel, convention center, or other commercial establishment or the network operator providing services at such establishments may intentionally block or disrupt personal Wi-Fi hot spots on such premises, including as part of an effort to force consumers to purchase access to the property owner's Wi-Fi network. Such action is illegal and violations could lead to the assessment of substantial monetary penalties.³

In addition, we reiterate that Federal law prohibits the operation, marketing, or sale of any type of jamming equipment, including devices that interfere with Wi-Fi, cellular, or public safety communications. Detailed information about the prohibition against jamming is available on the Commission's website at <http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/jammer-enforcement>.

What Should You Do if You Suspect Wi-Fi Blocking? If you have reason to believe your personal Wi-Fi hot spot has been blocked, you can file a complaint with the FCC. To do so, you can visit www.fcc.gov/complaints or call 1-888-CALL-FCC. If you contact the FCC, you are encouraged to provide as much detail as possible regarding the potential Wi-Fi blocking, including the date, time, location, and possible source.

Need More Information? Media inquiries should be directed to Neil Grace at 202-418-0506 or neil.grace@fcc.gov. For general information on the FCC, you may contact the FCC at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) or visit our website at www.fcc.gov. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (TTY).

Issued by: Chief, Enforcement Bureau

³ All operators, including of a Part 15 device, must comply with the Communications Act, including Section 333, and the Commission's rules.