[GB] Ofcom Consults on Licensing the Use of Mobile Phones On Board Planes

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The UK communications regulator Ofcom has opened a consultation on proposals concerning licensing the right to use mobile telephones on commercial aircraft. The consultation opened on 18 October 2007 and it closes on 30 November 2007. The consultation follows a discussion document published in 2006.

Ofcom's responsibility is limited to spectrum regulation and the problem of potential intereference with terrestrial networks. Accordingly, the use of such equipment would be licensed only above 3000 metres.

Such onboard networks should not be, in Ofcom's opinion, "licence-exempt" because of the "...uncertainty surrounding the performance of these systems in operation and the substantial risks to terrestrial networks if they were the victims of interference."

Whether such licensed use of the spectrum would involve possible fees is also being discussed.

Ofcom states that the matter of equipment safety is not its responsibility, but falls under the European Aviation Safety Agency. In addition, each European country has its own national authority, which deals with such matters, e.g. in the UK, it is the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Ofcom also believes that consumer concerns - e.g., passenger comfort and concerns about the use of mobile phones - are also the responsibilty of the CAA.

"Mobile services on aircraft", executive summary

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/telecoms/reports/aircraft/

"Enabling mobile phone use on Aircaft", press release of 18 October 2007

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2007/10/nr_20071018

"Mobile Communications onboard Aircraft, Consultation on the introduction of mobile services on aircraft", 18 October 2007

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/mca/mobilecomms.pdf

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