

Cable Signal Leakage

Cable television systems use radio frequency signals transmitted over cables to provide television and data services to customers. Normally, these RF signals do not cause interference when cable systems comply with Federal Communications Commission rules for limiting interference. Occasionally, however, cable television system signals can “leak.” Cable signal leaks occur when the RF signals transmitted within a cable system are not properly contained within the cable plant. Cable signal leaks can be caused by loose connectors, damaged plant and cracked or unterminated cables.

Why is it important to determine leakage?

Cable television systems and licensed over-the-air broadcasters use many of the same frequencies to transmit programming. Specifically, cable systems use TV, radio and aeronautical radio channels, among others, within their cable plant. Cable operators are considered the secondary users of these frequencies; therefore they must not interfere with the licensed over-the-air users who are the protected (primary) users of these frequencies.

What problems can signal leakage cause?

Cable signal leakage can interfere with any of the over-the-air services that happen to be using the same frequencies as the cable operator and that are within the vicinity of the cable system. This interference, especially on the emergency channels, can interfere with the communications of safety personnel or airplane pilots. When this interference occurs, it can endanger the lives or hamper the rescue efforts of safety personnel.

What are the FCC rules governing signal leakage?

The FCC has set maximum individual signal leakage levels for cable systems. The FCC sets even more stringent limits for cable systems that may interfere with aeronautical and navigation communications. As a further measure, the FCC requires cable operators to have a periodic, on-going program to inspect, locate and repair leaks on their systems.

Does a cable operator need to come into my home to monitor for signal leakage?

Usually, no. Cable operators can use equipment to locate the general area of a leak. To pinpoint a leakage source for subsequent repair, however, the cable operator may request access to your home.

Am I required to let the cable operator into my home to monitor for and repair signal leakage?

Homeowners have the right to deny access to their premises. If a leak cannot be repaired without access to your home, however, a cable operator can disconnect your service for denied access.

Can my cable operator terminate my service because of signal leakage?

The FCC’s rules allow cable operators to disconnect service in order to repair signal leakage that exceeds FCC standards. The operator restores service when the signal leakage problem is remedied, and may not charge you for service while it is disconnected.

Is the cable operator responsible for repairing signal leakage on subscriber-owned equipment?

No.

Can I hook up a second set myself?

In terms of the signal leakage rules, yes, but because the cable operator is responsible for leakage from the wiring, the operator can either refuse to connect to it or terminate service if the hook up causes signal leakage problems.

Is signal leakage biologically harmful?

The power levels used in a cable system are low. Therefore, it is unlikely that cable signal leakage from a cable facility will exceed the FCC's guidelines for exposure to radio frequency emissions.

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); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- 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

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