

What to do if you hear radio communications on your telephone

Interference occurs when your telephone instrument fails to "block out" a nearby radio communication. Potential interference problems begin when the telephone is built at the factory. All telephones contain electronic components that are sensitive to radio frequencies, but cordless telephones are particularly susceptible because they use radio transmitters/receivers. Cordless telephones are also highly sensitive to electrical noise, (electric fences) radio interference, and the communications of other nearby cordless phones. Cordless phones with more features like messaging, redial and intercom, contain more electronic components; this creates a greater potential for outside interference.

If the manufacturer does not build in interference protection, these components may react to nearby radio communications. For example, you could hear the transmission of a local radio station through your telephone's handset. This is not necessarily a sign that the interference is intentional or that the interfering radio transmitter is illegal but that your equipment has no, or inadequate, protection.

If you own an unprotected telephone, as the radio environment around you changes, you may sometimes hear unwanted radio communications. This is a technical problem, not a law enforcement problem

Because interference problems begin at the factory, you should send your complaint to the manufacturer who built your telephone. It is important that you follow through and contact the manufacturer of your phone if you are having an interference problem. The company needs to know if you are unhappy about your phone's failure to block out radio communications. Also, the manufacturer knows the designs of its telephones and may be able to suggest a solution for your specific phone.

What can I do?

Interference problems in telephones can sometimes be stopped or greatly reduced with a radio filter. Install this filter at the back of the telephone, on the line cord, and/or at the telephone wall jack. Radio filters are available at local phone product stores, online and by mail order.

You can also stop interference by using a specially designed "radio-proof" telephone, available on line or by mail order. A recent FCC study found that these telephones, which have built-in interference protection, are a very effective remedy.

To get started, follow these steps:

If you have several telephones, or accessories such as answering machines, unplug all of them. Then plug each unit back in, one at a time, at one of your wall

jacks. Listen for the radio communication. If you hear interference through only one telephone (or only when the answering machine is plugged in), then the problem is in that unit. Contact the manufacturer of that unit for help. Alternatively, simply stop using that unit, replace it with a radio-proof model, or install a radio filter. Only a very small percentage of interference problems occur in the outside telephone lines. Your local telephone company can check for this type of problem.

What am I hearing?

You can identify the type of radio communication by listening to it. There are three common types: (may require a different filter)

(1) AM/FM broadcast radio stations - Music or continuous talk distinguishes this type of radio communication. The station identifies itself by its call letters at or near the top of each hour.

(2) Citizen's Band (CB) radio operators - These radio operators use nicknames or "handles" to identify themselves on the radio. Usually, the CB operator's voice is clearly heard. You may also hear sound effects or other noises.

(3) Amateur ("ham") radio operators - Amateur radio operators are licensed by the FCC. They use call letters to identify their communications. The amateur's voice can be heard but may be garbled or distorted.

Final note

Current FCC regulations do not address how well a telephone blocks out radio communications. At present, FCC service consists of the self-help information contained in this bulletin.

The FCC strongly encourages manufacturers to include interference protection in their telephones as a benefit to consumers. The telephone manufacturing industry has begun to develop voluntary standards for interference protection.