



CellAntenna CEO: Ease up on jamming ban

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By Lynnette Luna

DENVER—Howard Melamed, CEO of CellAntenna Corp., has launched a one-man crusade of sorts urging the Federal Communications Commission to allow public-safety to use jamming devices to ward off the dangers of cell-phone-triggered explosives.

Law enforcement officials recently confirmed the use of cellular-phone triggers in London's July bombings, while daily reports are coming from Iraq of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) using hobbyist-grade remote-control devices and cellular phones.

Current laws prohibit the use of any radio-frequency jamming equipment by private and public organizations, limiting the ability of law enforcement to control threats in the event of an emergency, said Melamed. The law has been in place since 1934, before cell phones or El Qaeda, he said.

"After the bombs in the U.K., the FCC came out re-affirming its ban on jamming technology," said Melamed. "Homeland security agrees with us. It's crazy."

Most countries do not allow cell-phone jamming. But a growing number of countries are easing the constraints. Israel, for one, allows jammers, given its concern that terrorists might use cell phones to remotely detonate bombs. Japan loosened its rules on cell-phone jamming in early 2000, allowing licenses in some public areas such as theaters. Australia allows limited use of jamming devices under special license. Canadian regulations allow jammers to be licensed for use only by police departments and other security agencies.

Ironically, CellAntenna designs in-building repeater systems to extend coverage of cellular systems while selling jammers, which include portable personal jammers, cellular jamming devices and high-powered jamming devices that can take out several blocks of service. The company also has patent-pending technology to jam spread-spectrum technology such as 802.11a/b and CDMA, which cannot be knocked out using traditional jamming methods such as band sweeping and energy slamming.

Places like the Lincoln Tunnel should have limited service, said Melamed, and there are many creative ways to implement jamming. For instance, jamming technology can allow users to place calls but not receive them so the phone doesn't ring. Today, public-safety agencies are left begging cellular companies to turn off service in high-risk areas such as tunnels, and they are frustrated, said Melamed.

Melamed says his customers today in the U.S. are rogue local government agencies who are concerned about safety and are willing to defy FCC regulations.