



GCHQ Reference: TSI/1447/TSI
Date: 21 March 2011

The following statement has been released by Neil Kempson, Director of Engineering and Technology.

TSI/1447/TSI

10 March 2011.

Power Line Technology and Associated Home Networking Devices.

Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) wishes to express its concern over the manufacture, importation, and sales of equipment used in support of the above technologies.

Despite public assurances given by Ofcom we believe some of this equipment may not meet the Essential Requirements of the EMC Directive. While they rely on the current applicable IT Harmonised Standard in part, much of the compliance documentation of these products appears to rely upon withdrawn committee draft documentation which does not adequately protect the spectrum from radio interference in the HF, VHF, and UHF spectrum. We accept it may meet parts of other standards. The lack of protection is likely to cause a detrimental affect to part of the core business of this Department.

We are already measuring an increase in the HF noise floor in the vicinity of our HF receiving stations, with wide variations between day time and night time levels. The propagation of noise in this band also varies according to seasonal changes and other natural phenomena.

In the Power Line Technology (PLT) meeting of 8 February 2011 the Civil Aviation Authority, amongst others, expressed a view that the RFI from these devices was likely to pose a safety of life risk. We concur and support this view from our own perspective.

Other interference issues have been raised by MoD, BBC, RSGB, and other players in the telecommunications industry.

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Although not wishing to be product specific, we understand that Comtrend currently estimates that in excess of 1.5 million home networking units are in circulation within the UK and that numbers are due to escalate significantly with the release and promotion of 'Youview'. Additionally, BT's Vision service also supplies the Comtrend 9020 product.

While we acknowledge that an item specific harmonised standard to regulate these devices is under consideration, we are concerned that in its present form it may still not provide adequate protection for the spectrum. Ofcom and the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) do have powers under existing legislation to stop the current marketing of this technology, and GCHQ would petition them to act forthwith before the situation deteriorates such that HF communications reception in some areas becomes virtually impossible.

The BIS report 'The General National Market Surveillance Programme for the UK – 2011' issued in December 2010 specifically states "(it) is to ensure the free circulation of safe and otherwise compliant products in the UK". We believe that PLT and home networking equipment as described does not satisfy this requirement.

The Wireless Telegraphy Act also gives provision for Ofcom to act against specific instances of interference from this technology when in use. We urge them to adopt such powers.

Responses to this statement should be addressed, in the first instance, to:

Nick Negus, Spectrum Manager,
Room C3e
GCHQ
Hubble Road
Cheltenham
GL52 0EX

Tel: 01242-221491 x 34261.

