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COMPLIANT OR COMPLACENT?

On Jan. 1, 2013 the FCC's new narrowband frequency requirements go into effect. These regulations require old wideband radio frequencies (25 kHz wide channels) be reduced to 12.5 kHz). This applies to all UHF and VHF frequencies between 150-512 MHz (VHF) and 150-174 MHz (VHF). It also affects any repeaters you might have on your communication system. Lastly, it applies to SCADA systems, so if your system incorporates SCADA communication technology you will need to update that, as well. This is not new news as the FCC announced the requirement back in 1999, but as time gets closer you need to make sure you are compliant as radios are a big part of many golf courses irrigation systems communications.

You have probably already dealt with the narrowband frequency issue with your crew's radios, but did you look at the irrigation radios? Radio communication in regards to the irrigation system can include; remote control, computer to field controller communication, weather station communication and pump station communication. On your FCC license in the far right is a column labeled "Emission Designator". If the first two digits are greater than 11 you will need to modify the license. Most new radios are capable of being reprogrammed from wideband to narrowband, but your license will still need modification to remove any wideband emission designators.

The good news is that the manufacturers have been shipping narrowband compliant equipment for years;

Toro and Hunter since approximately 2001 and Rain Bird since 1998. However, many of you have irrigation systems that are much older than that, so you must make sure you won't have any issues. Your handheld remote is probably the most vulnerable. If it is more than 12 years old it is probably wideband. To check, look at your FCC license or call your distributor. If it is wideband, you will need to modify your license and upgrade your radios.

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Unfortunately, many superintendents during this process have discovered they have no FCC license for their radios. Remember UHF and VHF radios require a FCC license to operate. If your system is a 900 MHz system, then no license is required. So if you have no license, then it's time to get one and this can be expensive.

An alternative is to change your technology. Download a free app for your existing or to-be- purchased iPad and use that as your remote control system instead of the radio. It is much less expensive than the license (updated or new) and new radios, not to mention a lot more fun. You can also change your system to 900 MHz radios which doesn't require a license.

If your system uses radio communication for central to field controller communication, and it is still wideband, than you've got lots more to do and your costs will be substantially higher as narrowband equipment is more expensive. You may have to upgrade your control system hardware. By now your local irrigation distributor should have been in contact with you and you should have a plan in place for upgrading before the year is out. Many manufacturers have special pricing available for upgrades, especially if you are a member of their service plans, such as Rain Bird's GSP or Toro's NSN.

The FCC has stated it will not extend the deadline and the fines for non-compliance are pretty hefty, upwards of \$25,000.00 for unauthorized or illegal operation. They will also cancel your license and the FCC has stated relicensing of cancelled systems will become very difficult. You cannot mix wideband and narrowband. You have to be one or the other and starting January 1 it has to be narrowband.

Depending on your system, your pump station monitoring package and communication or your weather station communication with your central computer could also utilize radio communication and those frequencies need to be checked and possibly upgraded.

This change in frequencies is an important issue. It is not something that can be changed overnight and requires time, planning and cash. And in this day and age, all of those are at a premium. **GCI**