

GPS Interference

Background

GPS is a critical tool that a significant number of recreational boaters rely upon for safe navigation. With some 12 million registered boats in the United States, GPS is ubiquitous on crafts ranging from small bass boats to ocean crossing sailing vessels.

Recent action by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) could create significant interference with the GPS system that boaters have come to rely on. On April 22, 2020, the FCC granted an order allowing a private company called Ligado (formally LightSquared), to operate a mobile telephone network using spectrum that is in close proximity to the GPS spectrum. Multiple Federal agencies, including the Departments of Defense and Transportation, have expressed concern that the FCC's action would create interference that impacts the reliability and accuracy of GPS. Under the FCC's order, the cost of dealing with interference would be borne by individual boat owners.

Status

The FCC's decision issued on April 22, 2020 is currently being appealed by a broad range of GPS users including marine, aviation, agriculture, construction and myriad other groups. A hearing was held in the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 6 where DOD officials raised significant concerns with the potential impact on military users. Senator Inhofe (OK) is introducing legislation that will require an assessment of the costs to both government and private sector users.

Ligado/LightSquared has not yet indicated when it will begin operations.

Position

BoatU.S. has significant concerns with any potential interference with a reliable navigation signal. We also do not believe the individual boat owners should bear the costs to upgrade equipment in order to be assured of the reliability of their GPS navigation systems.

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