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NPRM Addresses Interservice Interference Criteria

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The FCC has issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking intended to settle once and for all the long-simmering dispute between Satellite Digital Audio Radio Service (SDARS) licensees and neighboring Wireless Communications Service licensees. A decade ago, the two satellite broadcasters were allocated 12.5 MHz each of spectrum in the 2300 MHz band in order to provide “ancillary terrestrial service.” This was intended to permit the satellite operators to reach hard-to-serve terrestrial spots by using terrestrial repeaters. Regular terrestrial broadcasters have long been wary that such “ancillary” operations could easily become an avenue for delivering local programming throughout the country – a key competitive element that distinguishes regular broadcasters from their satellite cousins. At the same time, the Commission’s existing rules have hampered the ability of either SDARS licensees or WCS licensees in the adjacent bands to go into operation without interfering with each other.

The FCC, having received competing proposals from both sides as to how to proceed, has put both proposals out for comment in an effort to come up with technical rules which are workable on a long term basis. It also is considering placing clear limitations on the ability of SDARS licensees to distribute local programming over their ancillary facilities. Comments were due February 14, and replies may be filed up to March 15.