

Our Reference: 20100837
Your Ref:

3 September 2010

John Hayes MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Hayes

Re: Mr J Peters, 218 New House Farm, Hospital Drove, Long Sutton, Spalding, Lincs.

Thank you for your letter dated 25 August on behalf of your constituent, Mr Peters, about power line technology.

We are acutely aware of the concerns of some amateur radio users regarding interference issues associated with the use of power line technology (PLT). We continue to work very closely with those affected by interference. Though I would like to stress that we have yet to receive a complaint of interference from the emergency services or any other radio user, outside the amateur radio community.

It is clear that Mr Peters is aware of the work we are doing in this area, but I have provided a bit more background information for your benefit, as well as providing information in response to Mr Peters' key concerns.

As with all electrical and electronic products sold in the UK, PLT equipment is required to meet the relevant regulations before it can be placed on the market. All electrical and electronic products sold in the UK must comply with the Electromagnetic Compatibility Regulations 2006 (the EMC Regulations) which are based on a European Directive. The person who places products on the market (usually the manufacturer or the importer) must ensure that the products comply with the Regulations and are marked accordingly.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is responsible for overseeing the EMC Regulations. Enforcement powers have been delegated to local Trading Standards offices and to Ofcom where there is a radio spectrum protection or management issue.

We estimate there are around 1.8 million pairs of PLT equipment in use in the UK and we take the issue of interference that this technology might cause very seriously. To date we have received around 214 individual complaints of interference attributed to PLT equipment all of which are in the process of being investigated or have been successfully resolved.

In some cases the manner in which the equipment has been installed or is operated can cause the interference, and as well as investigating specific cases of interference, we have also offered advice and assistance on how to avoid this. This has included the publication of a set of questions and answers on our website, which clearly set out the issues involved and what work is being carried out, both in the UK and in Europe. I have included a copy of this for your information.

As Mr Peters mentions, we recently published a study to estimate the likelihood and extent of interference to various services over the coming 10 years. The study found that there will be a low likelihood of interference with other spectrum users, providing certain technology enhancements are implemented. The study also found that these technology enhancements are on the product roadmaps of many of the PLT device manufacturers and suppliers, and are already expected to feature in products this year.

Indeed, we have already been informed by BT, the main supplier of PLT devices in the UK, that following work they have undertaken with Comtrend (a major manufacturer of these devices), an upgraded and improved product is now being produced which will dramatically reduce the potential for causing interference. Product innovation in this way is a likely outcome, as stated in our report, and I hope that the benefits of this enhancement will be seen soon.

In addition to product innovation, one of the uncertainties associated with this technology is the absence of a suitable harmonised standard for manufacturers and regulators to use as a benchmark. The European Commission has acknowledged this problem, and I am happy to say we have recently been informed that the Commission has requested the Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization to begin work immediately in producing a standard, a move that we in Ofcom strongly support. This is particularly important because the products are manufactured and sold across the EU.

I appreciate that this response will not be the one that Mr Peters was hoping for, but I hope it has clarified our position and the ongoing work that is being undertaken to tackle this issue. We will continue to work with Mr Peters to resolve his own interference concerns. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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