

Soon an extinct species? Frequency assignment strategies threaten wireless microphones

Frankfurt/Wedemark, March 28, 2007 – Will the energetic and stage shows of superstars such as Madonna and Nelly Furtado soon be a thing of the past? Will creative expression in the future be limited by being bound to a microphone stand or dragging a microphone cable behind? “At the moment this is how it seems,” warns Volker Bartels, Speaker of the Executive Committee of audio specialist Sennheiser electronic GmbH & Co. KG. “Mobile phone operators are chasing for further frequency range space for their phones, and the wireless microphone, which is not supported by a financially strong lobby, appears to be in the way.”

Wireless microphones are approved as secondary users within the VHF and UHF spectrum and have permission to operate as long as they don't interfere with the primary users, i.e. television and radio. This is the state of play according to the agreements of Stockholm (1961) and Chester (1997). However, this peaceful coexistence is being threatened. The Task Group TG 4 of the European Communications Commission is planning to eliminate the Chester agreement – and the frequency spectrum in question has caught the eyes of new service operators. “The introduction of digital television DVB-T has already led to a significant reduction of the frequency range that is available to wireless microphones,” explains Volker Bartels, President Production and Logistics of the Sennheiser Group. “Now mobile phone providers, wireless DSL and mobile phone TV (DVB-H) have appeared and are all demanding significantly more and new frequencies, especially within the UHF range.”

“The effects on the entertainment and event industries could be devastating,” says Volker Bartels. “Just imagine what a musical with wire-bound microphones would look like. Or the concert of one of your favorite artists. Music festivals, stadium sound, film productions, theater plays – all these work so effortlessly today because of wireless microphones. The production of program content, major sports events such as the Olympic Games or Football

World Championships and news reporting – all are reliant on wireless technology.”

Sennheiser jubilee – and dark clouds are on the horizon

It was exactly 50 years ago that Sennheiser presented its first wireless microphone in Frankfurt, and 25 years ago the company manufactured the first UHF microphone systems for German national television. These microphone systems introduced a whole new dimension to media productions – a quality and freedom of movement that viewers have long become accustomed to.

In Europe alone, in 2005 and 2006, approx. 20% more wireless professional microphone systems have been taken into operation – a number that underlines the vast importance of wireless audio technology for media productions and entertainment industries. “We estimate that in Europe alone four to five million professional wireless microphone systems are being operated at this moment in time,” says Bartels. “These microphones must not be seen in isolation. They are at the beginning of a production chain, which creates content that all viewers want to watch, including the users of DVB-H and wireless DSL. Therefore I urge the people responsible to let the agreement of Chester remain in effect, which means to protect wireless microphones and guarantee the frequency ranges that are necessary for their operation. If errors are made at this stage, the future of the whole of media production will be put at risk.”

Visit Sennheiser at the proligh+sound, Hall 4.1, Booth E12.

As one of the world’s leading manufacturers of microphones, headphones and wireless transmission systems, the Sennheiser Group with its headquarters in Wedemark near Hanover, Germany, had total sales of about €300 million in 2005. The export share is 82.5%. Sennheiser has a total workforce of more than 1,650 employees, of whom about 60% are employed in Germany. Sennheiser is active worldwide and, in addition to other partnerships, has its own sales subsidiaries in France, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, India, Singapore, Canada, Mexico and the USA.

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