

# The ACMA steps up its fight against radio interference

A recent ACMA investigation has identified two people who were unlawfully using a commercial radiofrequency for their own personal communications channel.

The investigation was initiated when a licensed operator, whose clients had reported extensive interference on their licensed frequency, complained to the ACMA. This interference was caused by encrypted communications, which prevented the legitimate operators and their on-road staff from communicating with each other.

The severity of the interference required the licensee to transfer its clients from the compromised frequency until the problem was resolved.

Investigative work by the ACMA's Field Operations and Interference Management & Monitoring sections, who also received information from the public, tracked the origin of the interference to two Melbourne suburbs. Field staff used direction-finding and other techniques to pinpoint the exact addresses from where the offenders were transmitting.

Staff were also able to identify the encryption key, which helped in gathering valuable evidence to support compliance action against the two individuals.

The severe nature of the interference and the high risk to the safety of end-users meant that, for both of the identified locations, the ACMA applied to the Melbourne Magistrates Court for search warrants under section 269 of the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*.

ACMA staff executed peaceful entry search warrants on both premises and seized a total of seven radiocommunications devices. These radios had been programmed to operate on the frequency that was the subject of the interference.

The radios were also programmed to transmit frequencies for the Victoria Police country network, the Victoria State Emergency Service, the St John Ambulance, and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Programming transmit frequencies for organisations (such as the police) in unauthorised radios can cause serious interference to emergency communications, through either deliberate action or by accident (for example, jamming the transmit button permanently in the operated state).

The investigations and search warrants resulted in the resolution of the interference. As a penalty, radios used in contravention of the Act worth in excess of \$5,000 were surrendered to the ACMA. One offender, who held an amateur foundation licence, had his licence suspended for three months. The other offender was unlicensed.

The ACMA regulates the use of the radiofrequency spectrum in Australia, including ensuring that anyone issued with a licence is able to use their licensed frequency free of interference.

The ACMA has a range of powers available to it under the Radiocommunications Act to investigate complaints of interference. It considers the severity of the interference and the risk to licensed users of the radiofrequency spectrum before deciding on the most appropriate response to each complaint of interference. 📡

