

THE BIG RADIO MIC SWITCH-OFF!

This letter is to tell you about the change in radio microphone usage that will come about in the next few years: how it will affect you and what you can do about it. **You need to take notice of this if:**

- Your company owns radio mics
- Your company hires in radio mics
- Your company hires sound recordists or camera people who supply radio mics.

Almost all radio mics used in documentary television use frequencies in Channel 69 – specifically in the range 854 - 862 MHz. If you own radio mics working in this band you should have a licence to operate them. If you hire them, the hire company's licence or the freelance supplier's licence will cover you.

All licensed users have received a letter from OFCOM recently telling them that, as part of European harmonization, Channel 69 is to be sold to the highest bidder. At some point shortly after the 2012 Olympics licensing will be withdrawn and those frequencies released to their new owner, most likely a mobile phone company. We are writing to you because if you are licensed via a hire company or sound recordist you will not have received the letter directly, and we also know that many radio mic users are unaware that they need a licence at all.

After the licences are withdrawn the current radio mics will become illegal and impractical to use, and will have to be replaced or converted. Costs vary, but a budget radio mic system will effectively become a write-off as it costs (at the moment) about £600 to convert to the new frequencies. Some of the more expensive radio microphones (including many of those typically used by freelancers) will also become write-offs because they can't be converted at all. Licensed users have been told that there will be 'funding' to convert or re-equip, but OFCOM's small print reveals that this will depend on when the equipment was purchased. Some users will receive nothing at all in the way of financial assistance. If you didn't hold a licence before 2nd February 2009 you won't receive a penny either.

Put simply, the implication is that **all production companies, hire facilities, camera operators and sound recordists (as well as numerous theatres, churches and other venues) will have to replace or convert their radio mics during the next three years.** But you can't do it yet as OFCOM has not confirmed the replacement frequency band.

If you hire radio mics, either from a hire company or via a freelancer, you can expect the rate to go up as they will have to re-equip. As sound recordists, we don't yet know what it will cost us to license our normal complement of radio mics. Currently it's £135 for two years, but we suspect it will be a lot more after 2012 and we will be replacing our radio mics too, of course.

There are things you can still do to help this situation, such as responding to OFCOM's consultation document at: www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/800mhz/howtorespond/. Questions 14 and 15 are particularly relevant as they concern eligibility for the available funding and the timing of licence withdrawal.

The whole consultation document is available at: www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/800mhz/ with the most relevant material on, and around, page 44. Responses need to be made before April 20th.

You can also get more information from members of the Institute of Broadcast Sound (IBS) and its website at: www.ibs.org.uk Good Luck with all the changes.

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