

# Should We Manage Cellphone Access in Certain Cases?

Terry Bittner, ITT Defense ([www.defense.itt.com](http://www.defense.itt.com))



Cell phones afford us the convenience of being connected whenever we want, wherever we want. Despite affording us constant connectivity, there remain places where cell phone usage is inappropriate. Texting and other non-disruptive ways of communicating, such as e-mail, have allowed patrons of cinemas, restaurants and theaters, to name just a few establishments, to at least partially realize the value of their cell phones.

One group who should never be able to fully realize the convenience of cell phones are inmates within our nation's correctional facilities. As these institutions are designed to isolate criminals from society, cell phone use by inmates is banned in all prisons. This summer President Obama signed the Cell Phone Contraband Act of 2010, which officially classified cell phones as contraband in federal prisons, making it a crime for prisoners to possess or use personal phones.

That hasn't stopped prisoners from smuggling phones inside. Across the country, cell phones have been used from inside prisons to orchestrate drug deals, intimidate witnesses, and even plan murders. Just this year, 7,000 cell phones were confiscated in California's prisons alone. In the past few years, prison officials have had to seriously consider ways to counter the threat posed by contraband cell phones in prison.

Some prison officials and politicians have advocated installing cell phone jammers in prisons. However, jammers are currently illegal under the Communications Act of 1934, and their installation for non-military purposes would require agreement from the FCC. While they could potentially disrupt the threat contraband cell phones pose, jammers would effectively blanket prisons—and, in all probability, the people in the vicinity of the prison—inside of a no-communication zone, jeopardizing legitimate and emergency communications.

Legalizing communications' jamming inside of prisons would also lend legitimacy to the idea of jammers as an effective way of controlling cell phone usage. Think of all of the places where cell phone use is discouraged—in movie theaters and hospitals, on trains and in certain restaurants. Would these institutions, emboldened by the precedent prisons could potentially set by installing jammers, also move to jam the cell phones of their patrons?

## **Should We Manage Cellphone Access in Certain Cases?**

Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

---

Jamming cell phone signals in prisons is an untested technology that offers a sledgehammer solution where a scalpel is required. Across the country, prisons have begun installing alternatives to jamming; facilities in Pennsylvania and Virginia, The Federal Board Of Prisons and others have been among the first to adopt RF detection technology. This system, named Cell Hound (for the way it “sniffs” out telephone signals), uses triangulation software to pinpoint the location of a cell phone behind prison walls and is seeing remarkable success. Not only does detection provide a legal and practical way to monitor illicit phone calls, it also presents a connection to other contraband within prison walls.

Recent FCC and NTIA workshops have attempted to address the issue, with mixed results. The FCC’s Workshop on Contraband Cell Phone Use In Prisons, in October this year, saw representatives from the public and private sector come together to discuss the issue. Even the jamming industry’s most ardent supporters conceded that detection offered a viable and effectual solution. Though no consensus was formed, the rigorous debate ensuing from these high profile deliberations is a step in the right direction, and proves that we have yet to learn all of the answers when it comes to cell phone jamming.

The alternatives to cell phone jamming have shown themselves to be successful, cost-effective and, most importantly, immediately realizable options to control contraband cell phone use in prisons. We cannot risk disrupting cell phone service through the use of what is essentially RF pollution, when other more practical and legal alternatives are available and in use already.

**Source URL (retrieved on 08/29/2014 - 8:31pm):**

[http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2010/11/should-we-manage-cellphone-access-certain-cases?qt-most\\_popular=0](http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2010/11/should-we-manage-cellphone-access-certain-cases?qt-most_popular=0)