Consumer Reports: Verizon iPhone has antenna issue

Consumers Reports said Friday that the iPhone 4 that works on Verizon Wireless' network has a similar problem to the original: Holding the phone in a certain way can cause dropped calls or problems dialing out.

In a blog post, Consumer Reports said it put the Verizon iPhone 4 through the same battery of tests it uses with all smart phones, plus some extra ones it used when the original iPhone 4 for AT&T Inc.'s network drew masses of complaints about poor reception.

The researchers again found that covering tiny gaps in the metal band that runs around the skinny edge of the Verizon iPhone caused "meaningful decline in performance." In conditions where cell signal was weak, the Verizon iPhone 4 dropped calls when the user covered the gaps by holding the phone in a specific - but natural - way.

The results were similar to what Consumer Reports found in its original iPhone 4 tests last year. Apple had changed the way it designed the smart phone's antenna starting with the iPhone 4, incorporating it into that band on the phone's outer edges. User complaints and Consumer Reports' tests showed that holding the phone in a way that covered up a spot on the antenna would cause the number of "bars" shown on the display to fall.

Apple denied problems with its antenna, instead blaming the way the phone's display calculates how many bars of service are available. But the company still gave out free cases last year to mitigate the problem.

When the iPhone 4 for Verizon was announced, Apple specifically noted its work on the antenna. On Friday, Apple spokeswoman Natalie Kerris reiterated Apple's claim.

"The iPhone 4 has a great antenna that allows it to have an amazingly thin design, great battery life and reception," Kerris said. "We designed the iPhone 4 external antenna to work great on Verizon's CDMA/EVDO network."

As it did with the original iPhone 4, Consumer Reports said it will not include the Verizon iPhone on its list of recommended smart phones due to the reception problem.

Apple's shares gained $5.13, or 1.5 percent, to $348.01 in afternoon trading.

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