

FCC: Router ban includes portable hotspots, but not phones with hotspot features



The Federal Communications Commission clarified this week that its sweeping ban on foreign-made consumer routers also affects portable hotspot devices.

The FCC added a new section to an FAQ titled, "Is my device a consumer-grade router under the National Security Determination?" The new FAQ section says this category includes "consumer-grade portable or mobile MiFi Wi-Fi or hotspot devices for residential use." The ban does not cover "mobile phones with hotspot features," the FAQ says.

This means that companies making consumer hotspots need an exemption from the government to import and sell any future hotspots that haven't previously been approved by the FCC. As with routers, devices previously approved for sale in the US can continue to be imported and sold without obtaining a special exemption.

The FCC defines routers broadly, giving the agency plenty of flexibility to include various types of consumer networking devices in the ban. When the FCC announced the ban last month, it defined routers as “consumer-grade networking devices that are primarily intended for residential use and can be installed by the customer,” and which “forward data packets, most commonly Internet Protocol (IP) packets, between networked systems.”

But while an earlier version of the FAQ stated that cellphones with mobile hotspot features were exempt, it did not specifically say that portable hotspot devices were covered by the ban. In addition to hotspot devices, the new FAQ section says the router ban applies to “consumer or small and medium-sized business routers sold or rented through retail and self-installable by end users”; “LTE/5G CPE [customer premises equipment] devices for residential use”; “residential routers installed by a professional or ISP”; and “residential gateways that combine modem and router functions.”

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