Australian Government

Fact Sheet

Small cells are being installed near my home. What do I need to know?

Small cells are smaller sized telecommunications equipment used to improve local coverage, add capacity and support new or enhanced mobile services in our communities. In most cases, small cells use low-powered radio transmitters that emit radiofrequency electromagnetic energy (RF EME) at levels below those identified by the Government as being safe for Australians to live, work and study near everyday. You might have seen small cells mounted to fixtures like street lights, power poles or bus stations.

Why am I hearing so much about small cells?

Part of the reason is 5G. It is the newest generation of technology for mobile phone networks and telecommunications companies are rolling out new small cell infrastructure. This will enable customers to realise the benefits of the new technology for themselves, such as fast downloads, higher data limits, and reduced delay in loading content. Broader benefits mean the new technology can be used for new applications that need a lot of data, such as working from home, or remote health services.

So, small cells are new?

Small cells are not new. They have been an essential part of telecommunications infrastructure for more than a decade and complement the larger macro mobile phone network to improve coverage, add capacity and support new or enhanced services and experiences, such as 5G, in localised areas.

Who installs these small cells?

The Government implemented laws allowing telecommunications companies like Telstra, Optus and Vodafone/TPG to install telecommunications infrastructure specified as low-impact facilities, such as small cells, on private or public land and infrastructure and set rules for the way in which telecommunications companies go about these installation activities. The Industry Code for Mobile Phone Base Station Deployment requires telecommunications companies to notify landowners and occupiers of proposed installations on their land or infrastructure, and to notify the community in the immediate vicinity.

And who's responsible for regulating them?

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) can check to ensure telecommunications companies comply with the notification requirements in the Industry Code and can also check the levels of RF EME emitted from small cells, or other telecommunications facilities, are below the maximum level of safe exposure identified in the relevant Radiofrequency Standard set by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA).

But are they safe?

Small cells are subject to the same regulations as equipment used in all other mobile phone base stations, devices and other telecommunications equipment. When operating within the levels set out in ARPANSA's Radiofrequency Standard, small cells and other telecommunications infrastructure are safe.

Learn more about the science of safe connection at eme.gov.au

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