

Churches scramble to meet FCC rules on wireless microphones

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—American churches have less than one week to change their wireless microphone equipment or face more than \$100,000 in fines.

In January, the Federal Communications Commission mandated that anyone using wireless microphones on the 700 MHz band must stop by June 12 in order to make room for use by police, fire and emergency services.

An unlicensed person or business—including churches—using microphones on frequencies between 698 and 806 MHz must stop or face action by the FCC. Violators could face up to \$112,500 in fines or imprisonment for continued violation, according to the FCC. Violations will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Since December 2008, Shure Inc., a Niles, Ill.-based audio-visual company, has worked with churches to replace their audio equipment.

“It’s like being told that you got to replace your dishwasher even though it’s working just fine,” said Chris Lyons, manager of educational and technical communication at Shure.

“It affects any church that has any number of microphones that work in the 700 MHz band. For the last several years, that has been one of the very popular parts of the band. So, there is a big installed base of wireless life there.”

More than 75 houses of worship have petitioned Congress to pass the

Wireless Microphone Users Interference Protection Act. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Bobby

Rush, D-Ill., would allow places like churches, educational facilities, recording studios and museums to register their spots on the television airwaves, or “white spaces,” that their wireless microphones operate on.

Mark Brunner, senior director of global brand management at Shure, said the problem was, in many ways, unanticipated in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

“Licenses were not on the radar of the FCC until they recognized, that in order to share this spectrum with new broadband devices, we’re going to need to know where these mic’s are,” Brunner said. “And if they don’t know where they are, they can’t run air traffic control.”