

In Flight Cell Phone Ban Could Hurt U.S. Competitiveness, According to Freesky Research

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Over the last year, close to a dozen airlines have announced plans to allow passengers to send text messages from their own cell phones. Passengers in Australia, France, Turkey, Ireland, Malaysia, India, and other countries are now using mobile devices in flight, or will be able to do so sometime in 2008. However, passengers in the United States will have to wait.

While many point to interference with ground networks, or the intrusiveness of chatty seat mates, the ability to send data to the ground is allowing Middle Eastern, Asian, and European business travelers greater chances to be productive on commercial jets than U.S. fliers, who are constrained by the FCC ban on cell phones in flight.

"Independent agencies have been testing mobile devices' interference with cockpit communications and navigation equipment for the last five years. But with live systems now installed on passenger planes in a variety of countries, there is growing operational evidence that picocell-based systems can allow phones to be used in flight without harming a ground network or an aircraft's avionics bus," according to David Gross, author of two reports that have looked at the matter. "We know Wi-Fi is safe, particularly with some airlines using the technology internally to connect cabin security cameras to Electronic Flight Bags in the cockpit. However, GSM and CDMA are becoming equally important as text messaging is emerging as one of the first major applications for in flight connectivity. As long as the United States maintains its current policy banning cellular antennas from being used on jets, it is allowing other countries to leap ahead with in flight productivity, while facing mounting evidence that there is no safety benefit to passengers."

The analysis of U.S. competitiveness in the sky is part of the firm's recent report, "In Flight Text Messaging" as well as its forthcoming study "Airborne Picocell Networks". More information about Freesky Research and the in flight connectivity industry is available at <http://www.freeskyresearch.com/>.

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