



**San Francisco  
Planning**

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## GENERAL PLANNING INFORMATION

# Wireless Telecommunication Services (WTS)

Date:  
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Subject:  
Wireless Telecommunication Services (WTS)  
City of San Francisco Review

### PURPOSE

Wireless providers are currently building out the next generation of wireless technology in order to meet the exponentially growing demand for data transmission on personal wireless devices such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets. This infrastructure build-out requires additional antenna installations throughout the City of San Francisco. The Federal Communications Commission has outlined review standards for local jurisdictions, and the City of San Francisco has further outlined standards for siting of WTS facilities within the city.

### FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC)

On January 3, 1996, the Federal Government adopted the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ("Act"). Specifically, Section 332(c)(7) of the Act preserves state and local authority over zoning and land use decisions for personal wireless service facilities, but establishes specific limitations on local jurisdiction regulation of wireless facilities. Among other things, the Act specifically prohibits local jurisdictions from disapproving wireless facilities for public health concerns or denying a permit without "substantial evidence" in a written record. Local jurisdictions retain land use authority and can regulate the height, location, visual impact, and/or zoning compliance of a new antenna.

### CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO REVIEW

In 1996, the City of San Francisco adopted Guidelines for Siting of WTS Facilities within the city. This document established preference standards for zoning districts and land uses; and provided a procedure by which antenna installations would be reviewed and authorized by the San Francisco Planning Department and the City of San Francisco Planning Commission. In 2003, the Planning Commission adopted a Supplement to the Guidelines to mitigate any negative impacts to neighborhoods while ensuring that local residents and businesses have dependable service. This update included a 500-foot community outreach notification, co-location standards, and submittal checklists.

### RADIO FREQUENCY (RF) EMISSIONS

Every WTS installation permit application is required to submit an RF emission report that is reviewed by the Department of Public Health (DPH). These reports are based on live testing at every facility to ensure that each site is within FCC established thresholds

for emissions 10 days after initial installation and every two years thereafter. Although the 1996 Telecommunications Act prohibits local jurisdictions from denying applications based on the potential/perceived health hazards, the WTS Guidelines require service providers to document that their facilities are operating within the established standards.

Based on the emissions reports submitted to DPH for verification, it has been the Department's experience that facilities operating at maximum power have never even approached the maximum threshold for human exposure. In fact, they rarely exceed 2% of the maximum exposure level. The 2003 Supplement to the Guidelines established the Commission Policy to require service providers to be up-to-date with their emissions reports for new applications to be processed by the Department.

## FAQ

*Why can't the city deny new antennas because of health concerns?*

The FCC has established a minimum public health standard for RF emissions. All carriers must submit an emissions report documenting that each site is within the FCC thresholds for emissions 10 days after initial installation and every two years thereafter. The FCC specifically prohibits local jurisdictions from denying wireless facilities for public health concerns if the site meets the FCC thresholds.

*I already have good cell phone coverage, why do we need these antennas?*

The wireless providers are preparing for the next generation of technology and growing consumer demand. This demand is largely based on mobile data transmission. The "four bars" that consumers refer to when discussing existing quality of cell phone coverage reflects voice transmission, not data transmission.

## Preferred Location Sites

1. **Publicly-Used Structures** (police or fire stations, libraries, utility structures, etc.);
2. **Co-location Sites** (per the 2003 Supplement, must have been approved pursuant to the 1996 Guidelines);
3. **Industrial or Commercial Structures** (with removal of visual obstructions/clutter);
4. **Industrial or Commercial Structures** (without removal of visual obstructions/clutter);
5. **Mixed Use Buildings in High Density Districts** (per the 2003 Supplement, with alternative site analysis);

## Limited Preference Sites

6. **Buildings in Neighborhood Commercial Districts** (with alternative site analysis demonstrating no other viable candidate);

## Disfavored Sites

7. **Buildings in Zoned Residential Districts** (with alternative site analysis demonstrating no other viable candidate).

Although the review process may differ based on the underlying zoning and use of the building, the required material submittals remain the same for all types of applications.

1. An updated 5-Year Plan must be on file;
2. Project Implementation Reports ("PIR") must be up to date for their existing sites;
3. An emissions report reviewed by DPH for accuracy for the proposed site;
4. Section 106 Declaration of Intent;
5. Photo-simulations; and
6. Plans.



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