

SPRINT'S SHUTDOWN OF AGING WIMAX NETWORK COULD CUT OFF THOUSANDS FROM AFFORDABLE INTERNET, TECHTIMES.COM

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A lawsuit filed against Sprint alleges that once the carrier retires its aging WiMax network early in November, Sprint will be cutting off thousands of Americans from affordable Internet connections.

The WiMax shutdown, which would be in favor of LTE, was first announced by Sprint last year. However, connected to Sprint's WiMax network are nonprofit organizations for two projects, namely Mobile Beacon and Mobile Citizen. The nonprofit organizations provide low-income areas and schools across the United States with affordable Internet connections, and they claim that Sprint is making it impossible to make the switch into LTE.

The nonprofit organizations that filed the lawsuit own spectrum that were granted by the FCC to be used for educational purposes. In 2006, the nonprofit organizations made an agreement with telecommunications company Clearwire to provide Internet connections through the WiMax network. The nonprofit organizations rented out part of the spectrum they own to Clearwire to allow the company to built out coverage, in exchange for cash, being granted access to the network and equipment, mostly in the form of mobile hotspots, that was sold to low-income social programs, libraries, schools and other such institutions with a discount.

However, Sprint bought Clearwire two years ago, and the lawsuit claims that several issues came afterwards. The nonprofit organizations claim that Sprint has implemented technical roadblocks to make switching to LTE as unfeasible, which would block non-profit institutions from making the change and cutting off Internet access to thousands of Americans.

Upon Sprint's announcement last year that it will be shutting down its WiMax network, the company reportedly looked to make a new contract to have the nonprofit organizations switch to LTE. However, the nonprofit organizations claim that Sprint is moving away from the initial terms of the agreement that it only inherited when it purchased Clearwire.

In March, Sprint agreed to move over 30 percent of the accounts of the nonprofit organizations to LTE. However, it was reported that it was a disaster for all the programs that were a part of it, as Sprint throttled the Internet connections unfairly. For example, the data of schools was set at only 6GB, far below their needed data, with Sprint slowing down speeds to a measly 256 kbps.

Once the WiMax network is shut down by Sprint on Nov. 6, it is estimated that 300,000 Americans will lose Internet access. The nonprofit organizations are seeking an injunction to maintain the network operational, and are looking to have Sprint put the accounts on LTE under the terms they claim they are entitled to.