



ILLEGAL CORDLESS DEVICES POLLUTE CELLULAR BANDWIDTH

An increase in the use of certain illegal cordless phones and wireless camera systems is interfering with cellular network signals, causing dropped call rates in the vicinity of the illegal devices to rise dramatically.

Gert du Plessis, chairman of the South African Cellular Telecommunications Association (SACTA), an independent association representing cellular equipment manufacturers and network operators, said that SACTA had noticed a sharp increase since 1999 in the number of devices operating illegally in bandwidths already allocated to licensed cellular operators.

“The licences issued to Vodacom, MTN and Cell C reserve certain frequencies in the 900MHz band for the provision of national cellular services but these bandwidths are increasingly being polluted by illegal devices, which interfere with cellphone calls in the area,” said Du Plessis.

The graph below illustrates the extent of the interference. It shows that up to 40% of calls made within a certain cell from 19 to 26 March 2002 were dropped due to interference from an illegal cordless phone or wireless camera operating nearby. After the interferer was identified and removed on 27 March, the dropped call rate decreased to less than 2%.

“As a result of the detrimental effects of these devices, the mobile operators are obliged to fully exploit all legal and other measures at their disposal, which may extend to the installation of advanced interference monitoring equipment at their base stations, in order to protect their legal rights and the quality of service levels to their customers. Information collected on the location of the illegal devices will then be provided to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) for action in terms of

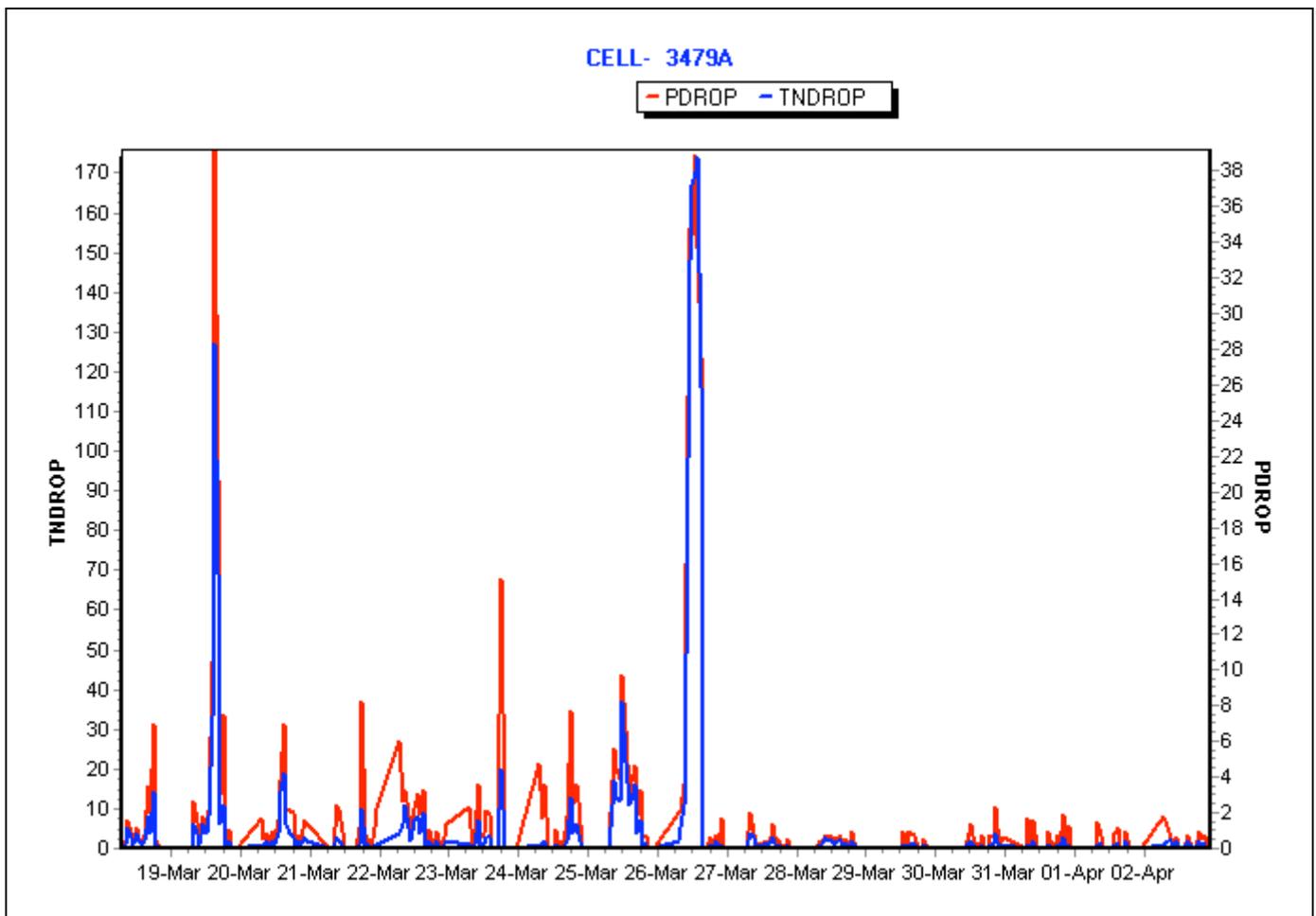
the legislation,” said Du Plessis. He added that South Africa’s three cellular network operators would ask ICASA to enforce the law on cordless devices more stringently in order to help curb the use of such devices.

Not all types of cordless phones and wireless cameras are illegal and a list of approved devices is published on ICASA’s website at www.icasa.org.za. Consumers who are unsure whether their cordless phone is legal, may submit it to an ICASA branch for classification.

GRAPH

PDROP = percentage of active calls dropped

TNDROP = number of calls dropped



Note on the law relating to cordless phones:

The Telecommunications Act 103 of 1996 provides for the approval and licensing of cordless telephone equipment. Approval has never been granted for cordless phones operating in the 902-907MHz band, and use thereof is strictly prohibited. According to a notice published by ICASA in the Government Gazette on 3 November 2000, the sale and use of cordless phones operating in the 914-915 and 959-960MHz band is prohibited as from 31 December 2000. Penalties for contravening the Act include a fine of up to R500 000, imprisonment for a period of up to two years, or both a fine and imprisonment. In terms of the Act, ICASA is authorised to seize and seal illegal phones.