



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Frequently Asked Questions about Wireless Facilities on Utility, Transit, or Street Light Poles

- 1. Who owns the wood poles?** The majority of wood utility poles in San Francisco are owned by the Joint Pole Association (JPA), which is an association of utility companies and government agencies. The City and County of San Francisco is a member of the JPA. Other wood poles are solely owned by Pacific Gas & Electric. These are typically streetlight-only wood poles.
- 2. Can the City prohibit the installation of wireless facilities on wood poles?** No. Under State law, telecommunications carriers have a right to install wireless facilities on wood poles in the public right-of-way. The City, however, regulates the design, location, and placement of those facilities through [Article 25 of the Public Works Code](#). The City will also conduct an environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act.
- 3. Does the City prefer wireless facilities on wood poles?** No. Our preference is for wireless carriers to work with the community, and Planning Department on well-designed and scale-appropriate rooftop-mounted facilities ([example photo simulations on pages 37 & 38](#) and [pages 32 & 33](#)); which are then complemented by wireless facilities on steel poles. Wireless facilities on rooftops and steel poles are generally less intrusive than wood pole-mounted facilities.
- 4. Is a permit required from the City?** Yes. The Department of Public Works (DPW) issues permits for wireless facilities in the public right-of-way under [Article 25 of the Public Works Code](#). As required by Article 25, DPW refers applications for wireless permits to the Department of Public Health (DPH) for radio frequency (RF) safety and noise review, to the Planning Department for design review, and to the Recreation and Parks Department for design review if the facility is located near a public park or plaza. [Link to sample DPH RF and noise review](#).
- 5. Does the City's permit review address health concerns?** Only in part. Under federal law, the City is prohibited from denying a permit to construct a wireless facility based on health concerns over RF emissions provided that the emissions from the facility comply with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) standards. In order to assure compliance with FCC standards, DPH reviews every application for a wireless facility and generally requires an RF emissions study for each facility. If the facility is approved and installed, then field testing is required to ensure the facility meets the FCC's standards. Residents can ask for testing of their dwelling units at no charge. Testing is also required every two years and every time the site is modified.
- 6. How can I get more information about my health concerns?** A copy of the DPH report for every proposed and existing wireless facility can be obtained from Patrick Fosdahl at DPH (415) 252-3094 or [Patrick.Fosdahl@sfdph.org](mailto:Patrick.Fosdahl@sfdph.org). In addition, general information about the safety of wireless facilities can be found on the FCC's web site ([link](#)).

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7. **Does the City's permit review address the design of the facility?** Yes. The Planning Department works with each applicant for a wireless facility permit to develop a design that is appropriate for the proposed location. Each design has its own challenges, such as the overall height of a top-mounted antenna or the potential for a side-mount antenna to impair views. In addition, City staff continually engages with wireless carriers and equipment manufacturers to seek designs that are less intrusive. Residents are encouraged to discuss their concerns with the Planning Department's Wireless Planner, Omar Masry, at (415) 575-9116 or [Omar.Masry@sfgov.org](mailto:Omar.Masry@sfgov.org).
8. **Does the City receive revenue from the use of wooden utility poles the facilities?** No. But the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission has started to allow the installation of wireless facilities on its (steel) street light poles and the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency is allowing the installation of wireless facilities on its (steel) support poles. Both agencies will receive license fees for use of their poles. [Link to March 4, 2015 presentation before the Architectural Review Committee.](#)
9. **How many wireless facilities are there in San Francisco?** As of March 2014, there are 383 existing wireless facilities on wood poles and approximately 800 wireless facilities outside of the public right-of-way; primarily on building rooftops.
10. **Who do these facilities serve and what companies operate them?** The wireless facilities installed on utility poles are primarily intended to serve customers of wireless carriers licensed by the FCC to operate in San Francisco including AT&T Mobility, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon Wireless. You might see signs on the utility poles that identify companies such as Crown Castle, ExteNet Systems, and Mobilitie as the owner of the facilities. These companies are authorized by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to install and operate the wireless facilities on wooden poles on behalf of their wireless carrier customers, but they still must obtain permits from DPW.
11. **Once DPW has issued a wireless permit can other carriers install additional facilities on the same wooden pole?** Generally, there will only be one wireless facility on each pole. CPUC regulations generally prohibit installing enough equipment on a utility pole for two separate wireless facilities. It is possible, however, that a single wireless facility on a utility pole could serve more than one carrier.
12. **Can carriers install new (wood) poles on my street to support their wireless facilities?** No. DPW will generally only allow new wood poles to replace existing poles. Pole replacements are sometimes needed to ensure the pole can handle the load of the equipment or for wider vertical separation between various utility facilities on the pole. Planning staff continues to work with carriers and PG&E to seek less intrusive pole height replacements.
13. **Is the City planning to underground the wood poles?** There are no pending proposals for new neighborhood-wide undergrounding efforts. In the event an undergrounding effort begins, the wireless carriers would be required to be remove their facilities from the wooden poles.

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14. **What equipment do wireless carriers typically install on the utility poles?** A typical wireless facility on a utility pole consists of one or more antennas and one or more equipment boxes. To meet CPUC requirements, the antennas will be mounted either at the top of the pole or on side arms. The equipment boxes will be attached to the pole. While every system varies, the equipment boxes typically include an electric meter, a disconnect switch, radio equipment, and computers to control the antennas. Some wireless facilities also feature an equipment box, on the same pole or a nearby pole, that contains batteries used to provide temporary emergency power to the facility in case of a power outage.
15. **Can carriers change the equipment they installed on a permitted wireless facility?** Yes. Consistent with federal law, Article 25 of the Public Works Code generally allows modifications of permitted wireless facilities, provided those modifications are within certain limits.
16. **Can I protest the installation of a wireless facility on my block?** Yes. If you have received notice that a wireless facility has been proposed to be installed on your block it means DPW has tentatively approved the application. It also means that the Planning Department, DPH, and possibly the Recreation and Park Department have recommended that DPW grant the permit. While you may protest the issuance of the permit, you must do so in the time set forth in the notice, which will be 20 days after the notice is issued. DPW will not consider an untimely protest. If your protest is timely, DPW will hold a hearing to determine whether to issue the permit. DPW will notify you of the date and time for the hearing. You will be given the opportunity during the hearing to explain the reasons for your protest. More information about protests can be found on the DPW web site ([link](#)).
17. **Can I appeal DPW's issuance of a wireless permit?** Yes. Whether or not you protested the permit you may appeal DPW's issuance of the permit to the Board of Appeals. You will be notified that DPW has issued the permit. As with protests, you must file your appeal in the time required by City law, which is generally 15 days after the permit is issued. More information about filing an appeal can be found on the Board of Appeals web site ([link](#)).