

Level	Spectrum Management	
High School		
Time Required	Lesson Summary	
125 minutes (2.5 – 50 minute class periods)	Students will investigate the local users of the spectrum and learn about additional users that are not in their area. Then students will work in small groups to create a priority list of spectrum users. The lesson will conclude with students comparing and contrasting their priority list to the priorities set by the federal government.	
Standards		
<b>NGSS</b>  HS-PS4-5 Communicate technical information about how some technological devices use the principles of wave behavior and wave interactions with matter to transmit and capture information and energy		
Vocabulary	Objectives	
Software-defined radio (SDR) Interference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Students will determine what types of devices use the spectrum</li><li>Students will allocate a limited resource and explain the reasoning behind their decisions</li><li>Students will understand how the government allocates the same resources and discuss the similarities and differences</li></ul>	
Materials		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>RTL-SDR dongle kit <a href="https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00VZ1AWQA/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o0l_s00?ie=UTF8&amp;psc=1">https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00VZ1AWQA/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o0l_s00?ie=UTF8&amp;psc=1</a></li><li>Download the free technical guide from the web site</li></ul>		



Pre-Requisites	
Students need to know about the electromagnetic spectrum, electromagnetic waves, and how the RTL-SDR dongle works.	
Safety Considerations	
None	
Pacing Notes	
<p>Day 1 – Explain how the dongle works and scan the spectrum, students create categories for local and additional spectrum users</p> <p>Day 2 – Students create a priority list of users, students investigate the government's allocation chart and identify the priorities</p> <p>Day 3 - Students compare and contrast the two priority schemes.</p>	
Before the Lesson	
<p>Make sure you have set up the hardware and software as described in chapters 1 and 2 of the windows-based technical guide.</p> <p>Print the spectrum management sheet, the how the government makes the rules page (or make available on your web page), the additional users of the spectrum sheet (or make it available on your webpage, and make the allotment chart available to students on your web page. The chart can be found here <a href="https://www.ntia.doc.gov/page/2011/united-states-frequency-allocation-chart">https://www.ntia.doc.gov/page/2011/united-states-frequency-allocation-chart</a> (last accessed 6/27/23)</p>	
Assessments	Classroom Instructions
Pre-Activity Assessments	Introduction
	<p>While you are taking attendance have students brainstorm all the devices they have that use the electromagnetic spectrum.</p> <p>After you are finished with administrative duties. Ask students to share things from their list and create a list on the board. To save time ask students to only share things which are not already written on the board.</p>



Activity Embedded Assessments	
<p>After explaining it to students and showing them a scan.</p> <p><b>Ask:</b> How does the RTL-SDR dongle receive the radio wave?</p> <p><b>Ask:</b> How is a picture made from the waves?</p>	<p><b>Provide Background Information</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. If you <b>did not</b> use Lesson four: Argumentation and radio waves in your classroom spend several minutes explaining to students how the RTL-SDR dongle receives radio waves.</li> <li>I. Scanning the spectrum</li> </ol> <p>Plug in the dongle and open SDR #</p> <p><b>Say:</b> This antenna receives radio frequency waves in the area. Those waves are invisible, but with the help of this dongle and some downloaded software, those signals are visualized into the image you see on the screen. This image is referred to as a "waterfall." The peaks occur at frequencies where there is a signal. The stuff between those peaks is referred to as "noise." This "noise" can be caused by many things, including bad reception from the antenna and less powerful signals from things such as microwaves. We will learn more about these less powerful signals during this lesson.</p> <p>With SDR# running be sure WFM is selected under Radio. Start at 88 MHz and continue scanning through 108 MHz. Every time there is a peak on the screen click on it and the frequency will appear in the display at the top. Students should record the frequency on their papers.</p> <p>Now click on NFM and scan from 60 to 800 MHz. There will be fewer signals here and you are more likely to see something on the waterfall than hear it. Students can use this page to identify these trunked signals later, <a href="https://www.sigidwiki.com/wiki/Category:Trunked_Radio">https://www.sigidwiki.com/wiki/Category:Trunked_Radio</a></p> <p>Now click on RAW and scan from 450 to 900 MHz. Like the scan above you will have fewer signals here. However, pause on each screen before you move on as some of these waterfalls are very interesting. When you click on them many will emit a sound which is neither static nor voices. Some of these sounds can be figured out by using this web page, <a href="https://www.sigidwiki.com/wiki/Category:Interfering">https://www.sigidwiki.com/wiki/Category:Interfering</a>.</p> <p>There are many other frequencies you could explore. The depth you can go to is dependent on the amount of time you are willing to spend.</p> <p>To cut down on the time spent on this activity it is not necessary to scan the entire frequency range. As long as each student who wants to scan the</p>



While students are working in small groups walk around.

Observe students, are they all actively engaged in the learning activity?

Approach the ones that are not and have a conversation with them.

**Ask:** What is your group doing now?

**Ask:** What would you like to contribute to this task?

Check that students understand they are not assigning frequencies but rather establishing priorities.

**Ask:** What does this percentage represent?

**Ask:** Which category of spectrum user do you think needs the greatest percentage of frequencies?

Why did you choose that category?

spectrum is given the opportunity to try it you may eliminate some of the scanning.

Each time a section is scanned:

**Ask:** Do you recognize any of these broadcasters? (Local radio stations use the frequency in the call sign so students may be able to identify some of the peaks.

After the class has scanned the required frequencies point out that this section of the spectrum is defined by certain frequencies. Tell students that there is a limited amount of spectrum available for use. Point out that every peak that was detected was created by a single broadcaster. Therefore, there can only be a certain number of broadcasters before the broadcasts start overlapping and interfering with one another.

## 2. Categorizing the users of the spectrum in the area

Government agencies, public safety and private businesses use radio frequencies to communicate with members of their organization and sometimes with the general public. These frequencies are a matter of public record and as such can be found on the web pages listed on the spectrum management page.

Hand out the Spectrum Management page. Students should work in pairs or groups of three for this activity. Students will first read through the list of broadcasters, create categories, and finally place each broadcaster into one of the categories they created. Frequently remind students that they need to provide an explanation for each category.

## 3. Identifying additional broadcasters

Say: Now that you have created categories based on the registered users in the area you are going to learn about some additional users of the spectrum. Determine if these users fit into existing categories or if you need to create new ones to accommodate them. Remember to have a reason for each category.

Instruct students to stop when finished with this activity and wait for you to provide additional information before moving on.



As students are working walk around and ask questions similar to the following:

**Ask:** Which categories currently have the greatest amount of government allocation?

**Ask:** What similarities have you found between the two allocation priorities?

**Ask:** What differences have you found?

**Ask:** Why do you think those exist?

4. Creating an allocation system

Explain to students that the government allocates the frequency bands based on a set of rules. Those rules have been created over many years by two government agencies. Tell them the allocation process is much more complicated than determine the importance of each use of the spectrum. This activity is meant to be a model of the process. Like all models this one has strengths and weaknesses.

Distribute the How the Government Creates the Rules page. Either have students read this silently to themselves or have students take turns reading it out loud.

Explain that they are not going to be allocating specific frequencies to users because as mentioned in the handout that requires a lot of time and input from several people. Instead they will be identifying which users should be given priority by assigning them the largest percentage of the useable spectrum.

Again, have students stop after completing this activity so you can provide additional information before they move on.

5. Investigating the existing allocation system

Direct students to the government allocation chart. They should estimate the percentage of the spectrum assigned to each of the categories in the table. This is not going to be an exact value and will probably vary from one group to another. That is okay, the purpose of the activity is to gain an understanding of the users and the amount of spectrum allocated. It is important that the percentages add up to 100. Then they should assign a ranking to each category. The higher the percentage, the higher the rank. This represents the US government priorities when it comes to spectrum usage.

	<p>6. Comparing and contrasting There is no need to stop students between the previous activity and this one. They can move forward at their own pace.</p>
Post Activity Assessments	Closure
The answers will help you determine if students understand how spectrum is allocated.	<p><b>Exit ticket</b> Students should answer the following questions on a sheet of paper and submit to you as they exit the room.</p> <p>How does the government make allotments of spectrum?</p>
Accommodations	
<p>Your students ability level should be taken into consideration when creating the group sizes. If your students are all have grade level reading levels and are motivated to participate in activities you could have pairs of students work together. However, if you have a variety of reading and motivation levels in your class a group of 3-4 students would be appropriate.</p>	
Educator Resources	
None	
Optional Extension Activities	
<p>After student groups have created their allocation system you could have students present this information to the class. Then students could discuss the choices made and groups could revisit their allocation percentages.</p>	



## Acknowledgments

This is the ninth lesson in a nine-lesson series intended to increase student understanding of radio frequencies. You are welcome to just use this lesson but if you are interested in this topic consider checking out the others in the series.

Lesson One: Mechanical Waves

Lesson Two: Electromagnetic Waves

Lesson Three: Electromagnetic Spectrum

Lesson Four: Argumentation and Radio Waves

Lesson Five: Investigating Spectrum Users

Lesson Six: Aircraft and Newton's Second Law of Motion

Lesson Seven: Weather Forecasting and Radio Waves

Lesson Eight: Satellites and Society

**Lesson Nine: Spectrum Management**

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