

LEGAL UPDATES

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FCC Adds Foreign-Made Robots and Power Inverters to Its National Security Blacklist

The FCC just widened its national security dragnet to two new categories of everyday tech: advanced robots and power inverters. If your company imports, sells, or uses either, here's what changed and why it matters.

On July 29, the Federal Communications Commission added foreign-produced advanced robotic devices and power inverters to its Covered List—the roster of equipment the agency has flagged as posing an unacceptable risk to U.S. national security or the safety of U.S. persons. The designations follow findings by a White House-convened interagency national security body, and they apply to qualifying devices made in any country outside the United States, not just adversary nations.

What's Actually Covered

The definitions are narrower than “any robot” or “any inverter,” but still sweep in a lot of common equipment:

Power inverters are covered if they include components enabling remote communication, control, sensing, data collection, or monitoring via Wi-Fi, cellular, Bluetooth, or similar connections.

Advanced robotic devices are covered if they're autonomous mobile robots weighing more than 4.4 pounds (including any docking station), and they also feature certain environmental sensors, wireless connectivity, and software.

A device counts as “foreign-produced” if it doesn't meet the federal “Buy American” definition of a domestic end product.

Why It Matters Now

Covered List status doesn't ban existing products or stop resales. It cuts off something more consequential going forward: new FCC equipment authorization. Since most electronics need that authorization before they can be imported, marketed, or sold in the U.S., any new robot or inverter model that qualifies as foreign-produced will need to clear a much higher bar to reach the U.S. market.

What's unaffected: consumers can keep using devices they already own, retailers can keep selling and importing previously authorized models, and federal government sales and use aren't touched. This is a forward-looking restriction on new models, not a recall.

Is There a Workaround?

Possibly. The FCC has left the door open to "Conditional Approvals" for foreign producers, but the bar is high. Before any conditional approval can issue, a separate national security determination is required: the Department of War must clear robotic devices, while the Department of War or the Department of Homeland Security must clear power inverters. Applicants also have to disclose ownership information, bill-of-materials data, and a detailed, time-bound plan to establish or expand U.S. manufacturing for the device in question.

The Bottom Line

If your supply chain includes foreign-made robotics or connected power inverters, this is the moment to map out which models you rely on, whether new versions are in the pipeline, and whether a conditional approval strategy makes sense. The restriction only bites on new authorizations, but for companies planning next-generation product launches, that's exactly where the exposure sits.

For the full legal analysis, read our blog on the FCC's new Covered List designations.

Husch Blackwell's Energy & Natural Resources and International Trade and Supply Chain teams are tracking these developments closely.

Contact Us

If you have questions about how the FCC's new Covered List designations may affect your company's robotics, power inverter, or broader technology supply chain strategy, please contact Dimitri Zografi, or your Husch Blackwell attorney with questions.