WASHINGTON (Reuters) - An executive for Verizon Wireless urged U.S. lawmakers and regulators to reject proposals that would impose open-platform requirements on valuable wireless airwaves that are scheduled to be auctioned off soon by the government.

Verizon Wireless's general counsel said at a congressional hearing that consumers ultimately would suffer if the government forced the winner of the auction to make some of the airwaves accessible using any device or software application.

"Consumer choice would be the casualty of policies that mandate that all companies do the same thing the same way," the company's general counsel, Steve Zipperstein, said in a statement at the hearing.

Verizon Wireless is owned by Verizon Communications Inc. and Vodafone Group Plc.

The comments came the day after reports that some open-access conditions would be included in an auction plans by the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Kevin Martin.

The open-platform approach is being backed by Google Inc., which has been studying whether to take part in the agency's auction of the 700-megahertz band airwaves. FCC officials are expected to hold the auction later this year and are in the process of setting rules for it.

Currently, wireless carriers restrict the models of cell phones that can be used on their networks and the software that can be downloaded onto them, such as ring tones, music or Web browser software.

Verizon had already voiced opposition to an open-platform requirement, arguing it would diminish the value of the spectrum and would be a form of Internet regulation.
In his statement at Wednesday's hearing, Zipperstein said an open-access requirement would undercut the carriers' ability to properly manage their networks and "threatens to disrupt the positive consumer experience that (supporters) claim to be promoting."

"Spectrum is a finite resource that must be managed efficiently for the benefit of all network users," Zipperstein said.

Martin is expected to circulate his proposal among the agency's other four commissioners sometime this week, possibly as early as today.

The airwaves to be sold in the 700-megahertz band are considered valuable because they can travel long distances and penetrate thick walls. The auction is seen as the last opportunity for a new player to enter the wireless market.

The 700-megahertz airwaves are being returned by broadcasters as they move from analog to digital signals early in 2009.

The rules will be crucial for the five or six biggest players, including Verizon and AT&T Inc., which want to bolster their networks, as well as for dozens of regional and local participants.
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