

FCC CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI
REMARKS TO FCC PUBLIC SAFETY WORKSHOP ON PROPOSED EXTENSION OF
OUTAGE REPORTING AND NETWORK RELIABILITY AND CONTINUITY
WASHINGTON, DC
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Good afternoon, and thank you all for participating in today's workshop, which couldn't be more timely.

In the past two weeks, we've experienced major events that have put our nation's communications infrastructure to the test – a hurricane and an earthquake in the Northeast within a five-day span, followed by Tropical Storm Lee, which hit the Gulf Coast this week.

These have had serious consequences. More than 50 people were killed by Hurricane Irene, and countless thousands have seen their homes and possessions destroyed by flooding.

I want to offer my condolences to the many people who have suffered as a result of these storms.

Admiral Jamie Barnett and his team in our Public Safety Bureau have been working around the clock with FEMA and our other federal partners as part of the intergovernmental effort to prepare for and respond to these events.

Many of you in attendance have been working overtime, too. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the American people.

These events have confirmed once again the importance of communications networks in times of crisis – both for first responders and the general public.

They also confirm that newer forms of communications like mobile phones and broadband Internet are increasingly important when disaster strikes.

In two weeks, the Commission will address proposals to accelerate Next Generation 9-1-1, which will upgrade 9-1-1 to seize the opportunities of these new technologies.

The earthquake and Hurricane Irene brought a number of emergency communications issues to the fore.

In general, these were issues we've already been focused on at the FCC.

Two examples are the subjects of today's forum -- network reliability and outage reporting, which are the focus of ongoing FCC proceedings that the Commission launched earlier this year.

As the FCC has done an initial review of Hurricane Irene and the earthquake, it's clear that a lot worked effectively and played a vital role in emergency response.

For example, the FCC successfully deployed several Roll Call teams, which used specially-equipped SUVs to survey damage to mobile networks, enhance situational awareness for first responders, and identify mobile infrastructure in need of repair or assistance.

The investments we have made in Roll Call provided important benefits in the recent storms.

The hurricane and earthquake also shed light on ways we can continue to enhance our work to ensure the reliability of communications during and following disasters.

There are three areas for follow-up.

First, the earthquake confirmed the importance of focusing on 9-1-1 calls made over mobile networks.

Americans increasingly rely on mobile communications, but some wireless networks experienced congestion following the earthquake – congestion that prevented some 9-1-1 calls from going through.

For this reason, the Next Gen 9-1-1 NPRM we take up this month will also address 9-1-1 prioritization.

And I will task CSRIC - the Communications Security, Reliability, and Interoperability Council - with providing recommendations on how to ensure that 9-1-1 is available when disasters spark a surge in mobile network use.

Second, our two outage reporting systems – DIRS and NORS – provided good information quickly.

This information is used to provide situational awareness regarding network outages to the FCC, FEMA, and others responding to a disaster.

But the ways consumers communicate are changing.

A growing number of people are cutting the cord and replacing their phone lines with mobile service.

Others are using VoIP and cable for phone calls.

We want our outage reporting systems to keep pace with those changes.

Our experience with these events will inform our pending rulemaking on outage reporting, which considers improvements to NORS, including expanding the system to VoIP and broadband outages.

The experiences and lessons of the last few weeks will also inform our separate but related inquiry on network reliability.

In the wake of the recent earthquake and hurricane, we have been meeting with carriers and service providers on these issues, including outage reporting, and I expect this will lead to improvements to DIRS and increased participation in this voluntary program.

Third, the recent events underscored the importance of public education about how best to prepare for and respond to disasters.

For example, people can help themselves and their families in the event of a power outage by making sure they have charged batteries available for their mobile devices. We can do more to help people focus on that in advance, and other useful information.

I've spoken to FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate about this and other issues, and the FCC will be working with FEMA and other federal partners to develop a single set of tips for emergency preparation and response related to communications, and to use broad distribution channels and public education programs to reach as many people as we can with common tips.

The steps I've outlined here can help save lives, and I look forward to working with all stakeholders to get these things done.

Thank you.