

**Opening Statement of Commissioner Ajit Pai
at the FCC Field Hearing at Moffett Federal Airfield**

Santa Clara, California

February 28, 2013

Good afternoon. I'd like to begin by thanking everyone at Moffett Federal Airfield for hosting today's event. We at the FCC can't claim to be your most exciting guests—for instance, I know that the cast and crew of "MythBusters" have used your hangars to test whether aircraft can be constructed of concrete, as well as other important questions. But we appreciate your hospitality nonetheless.

Today's hearing is a valuable complement to the Superstorm Sandy field hearings that we held earlier this month. In New York and New Jersey, we learned a great deal about the damage to our communications systems wrought by Sandy and what steps can be taken to harden our networks against hurricanes and flooding. But our nation is vast and geographically diverse. Mother Nature challenges each region in different ways, whether it's hurricanes in the East, earthquakes in the West, or tornadoes in the Midwest. So it's important, as we think about how to keep our communications networks running during emergencies, to consider our country's complexities before seizing any one-size-fits-all solutions.

Consider earthquakes. Whether it's a minor tremor or the "Big One," earthquakes offer distinct challenges for network operators. So I want to know how providers in California have adapted to that. Are wires more secure up on poles or buried in conduits? We heard at our previous hearings that copper is more brittle than alternatives like coaxial cable or fiber. How does that play out when an earthquake hits? Are newer deployment technologies—like mesh networking—an effective way to make our networks more resilient? I look forward to hearing about the experience of our American operators, as well as the views of our guest from Japan, Mr. Hirohito Noda. I understand that the use of flexible underground conduits and sliding joints helped enable Japan's wireline networks to perform relatively well in the immediate aftermath of the devastating Fukushima earthquake in 2011. What lessons can we learn from that experience? By contrast, power outages caused major problems for wireless networks following that earthquake. How did Japanese carriers overcome this and other challenges? What should we in the United States be doing to prepare our communications networks for a major earthquake?

Another thing we learned at the Sandy hearings was that effective disaster preparation and relief efforts require open communications and coordination among all parties—first responders, utilities, and network operators. That's certainly been the case in California. In the 2007 wildfires near San Diego, the flames spread so quickly that many people found themselves in harm's way before they were able to evacuate. One family was trapped in their ranch outside San Diego. But thankfully, only a few days earlier, Verizon had deployed a mobile cell vehicle, called a "Cell on Wheels" or COW, in the area. This allowed the family to use a cell phone to call local authorities. The local fire chief and police chief arrived, broke down the gate to the ranch and—with flames just 30–40 feet behind the family's car—the two men were able to save this family. That rescue effort was nothing short of heroic. And the exemplary coordination between local authorities and Verizon is a model for disaster relief and rescue efforts.

Yet another thing we learned at the Sandy hearings was the value of getting useful information about emergencies to the public. In California, that's happening in all sorts of ways. One example is Google's new Public Alerts feature, available through Google Maps. In addition to a catalogue of national emergencies, the feature lets users search for nearby alerts in any way they want. So searches run from the mundane ("storm watch"), to the serious ("earthquake relief"), to the fatalistic ("Zombie Apocalypse"). We need to figure out new and useful ways to get people the information they need, when they need it, and that's precisely what innovators in this area are aiming to do. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about recent developments on this front.

We also need to examine how emergency information is reaching (or not reaching) diverse communities, and there is no better place to study that than California. According to 2011 data from the Census Bureau, 43% of California residents speak a language other than English in their homes. An estimated 112 different languages are spoken in the Bay Area alone. In California today, broadcasters are transmitting programming in a wide variety of languages, including Spanish, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Tagalog. What are these radio and television stations doing to provide viewers and listeners with important public safety information?

Speaking of other languages, I am amazed at some of the pioneering ideas coming out of California companies for bridging the language divide. During a visit last month to a public safety answering point in Virginia, I heard how 911 call centers are using a Monterey-based phone service called Language Line to provide interpretation services to its emergency personnel. At low cost, Language Line lets public safety officials reach a translator almost instantly, no matter what language is needed. That's the kind of innovation we need if we're going to confront the challenge of 21st century emergency services.

In conclusion, it's my hope that today's hearing will continue a productive exchange of information about how to make our communications networks more resilient, and how we can ensure that emergency information is effectively communicated to the American people. Thank you for coming, and I look forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses.