

*Remarks of Chairman Julius Genachowski on the Public Safety and Homeland Security
Bureau's Presentation on the June 29-30th "Derecho" Storm
July 19, 2012*

Let me begin by offering my condolences to the many people who suffered as a result of the recent deadly storm and its impact.

And I want to thank David Turetsky and the staff of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau who have been working around-the-clock to respond to this disaster.

Immediately after the storm hit, the FCC began working to assess the damage to our communications infrastructure, coordinating with our partners at FEMA.

Recognizing the important issues raised by the storm and its effects, we immediately launched an inquiry of the storm's effects on communications in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic – to find out exactly what happened, what went wrong, and what can be done to ensure that we have reliable communications during future emergencies.

This work is so important, because -- as the derecho reminds us – communications networks are an essential part of all of our lives. Wired and wireless, fixed and mobile, telephone and broadband – they are how we connect to friends and family; how we get news and information; how we conduct commerce every day; and how we seek help in an emergency.

All of these forms of communications were essential during the derecho. With mobile phones, some people who lost power could nonetheless call for help, check on friends and family, or search the web or use Twitter and other social media to find information on where to find shelter, food, cooling stations and more.

But, as the bureau's presentation made clear, for all that went right with communications networks, too much went wrong.

More than 4 million people lost power during the storm, many for days. And the storm made abundantly clear how much of our everyday communications rely on our electric grid.

There were also outages at cell sites – making it difficult for some people to use even their mobile phones.

And a significant number of 9-1-1 systems and services were partially or completely down for several days.

In Prince William County, Virginia, someone called 9-1-1 to report a man suffering cardiac arrest and got a busy signal. He finally got help, fortunately, but only after the caller tracked down authorities on a non-emergency line.

The derecho made clear the absolutely vital role of our communications networks, particularly during emergencies.

That's why we immediately launched an examination into the events in the Mid-Atlantic, and I'm pleased that, as part of this, the Public Safety Bureau is working with FEMA and our state and local partners who manage our 911 networks.

And yesterday, we announced that we are expanding our derecho investigation to seek public input from a broad set of stakeholders across the country on other outages and on how to make our emergency and other communications more reliable and resilient everywhere.

The investigation and the public notice will inform our ongoing efforts on the reliability and continuity of communications networks, including mobile and broadband technologies, as well as our ongoing rulemaking to improve our outage reporting to make sure we get the info we need on VoIP and broadband outages, so that we can help protect public safety.

The bottom line – 911 outages are unacceptable, and we must and will work with all stakeholders to address this serious issue.

We've also been working hard on accelerating next-generation 911 as well as text-to-911, and recent events confirm the importance of this work.

These initiatives – and the action items that come out of our current inquiry – will help make the American people safer and more secure, and I look forward to working with my colleagues at the Commission and all stakeholders on this vital set of issues.

Thank you again to David and the people of the Public Safety Bureau for their work on this matter.