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Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

News media Information 202 / 418-0500
Fax-On-Demand 202 / 418-2830
TTY 202/418-2555
Internet: http://www.fcc.gov
ftp.fcc.gov

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NEWS MEDIA CONTACT
Justin Cole: 202-418-8191
Email: justin.cole@fcc.gov

FCC CHAIRMAN GENACHOWSKI ANNOUNCES POST-SUPERSTORM SANDY FIELD HEARINGS TO EXAMINE NEW CHALLENGES TO RESILIENCY OF U.S. COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS DURING NATURAL DISASTERS & OTHER TIMES OF CRISIS

Field hearings will address issues such as power & fuel dependencies, emergency permitting, resource sharing protocols, 9-1-1 accessibility, and others; Outcomes will inform recommendations to strengthen wired and wireless networks in the face of large-scale national emergencies

Washington, D.C. – Federal Communications Chairman Julius Genachowski today announced plans to convene a series of field hearings in the coming months to examine new challenges to the nation's communications networks in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, and help inform recommendations and action to improve network resiliency. The field hearings will focus on the unique challenges faced by communications service providers, state and local officials, emergency personnel, and consumers before, during and after Superstorm Sandy as well as other natural disasters. Beginning in early 2013, hearings will take place throughout the country in locations that have experienced major natural disasters, starting in New York. They will include businesses, public safety officials, engineering and academic experts, consumers and other stakeholders.

FCC Chairman Genachowski said, "This unprecedented storm has revealed new challenges that will require a national dialogue around ideas and actions to ensure the resilience of communications networks. As our thoughts and sympathies remain with those who have suffered loss and damage as a result of Superstorm Sandy, I urge all stakeholders to engage constructively in the period ahead."

He continued, "I want to thank Senator Chuck Schumer for his leadership, and welcome his call for the Commission to develop a roadmap for how to better protect critical communications functions during major disasters."

The field hearings will inquire about a number of topics, based on the Commission's current assessment of the U.S. communications infrastructure post-Superstorm Sandy. These inquiry topics and related questions include, but are not limited to, the following areas.

Sandy was an event for which communications providers had substantial advance notice.

- To what extent did service providers take advantage of this advance notice to stage communications assets such as portable cell sites to reduce the effects of the storm?
- To what extent did service providers notify consumers of their communications options in advance of the storm?

There were several instances where communications providers worked together to share resources to improve communications performance during Sandy.

- How can service providers best work together by sharing resources, such as cell sites, WiFi networks and transmission facilities? What can the Commission do to facilitate this? In what ways can these arrangements be made in advance so that they are in place when disaster strikes?

Our communications systems are increasingly reliant on electric power, both for the infrastructure and in homes and businesses: e.g., to power consumers' mobile and home communications devices and equipment, communications companies' central offices and cell sites, and broadcasters' transmitters and studios:

- What level of service is needed and expected during emergencies and for what modes of communications?
- When commercial power is unavailable, how long should back-up power sources be expected to last?
- Over the years there have been many developments in back-up power practices and technology for use in communications networks. What technologies and practices are in use today and how do they affect the ability of communications service providers to maintain service during power outages? What technologies, actions, practices or requirements should be considered to help improve the availability of power?
- What challenges exist to the deployment of back-up power solutions? What cost, safety and environmental issues need to be taken into account and are there different challenges to deploying back-up power solutions for small carriers and to service in urban, suburban, and rural areas, and tribal lands?
- To what extent is back-up power provided for equipment in the home? What can be done to improve consumer awareness of the limits of any back-up battery power that may be available when commercial power fails and what can be done to improve upon these limitations?
- What capabilities do communications providers offer their customers to alleviate disruptions to communications services during an emergency, or to help maintain back-up power supplies for Internet and cable access? For example, what kinds of solutions are made available to customers to help them charge devices like cell phones?

In addition to back-up power, transport connectivity between cell sites and other network nodes failed, resulting in disruptions to wireless communications:

- How can transport, interconnection, and switching be made more reliable in disasters and less vulnerable to floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, blizzards and other damage? What other interdependencies are there that should be reduced and how?
- What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of different backhaul technologies in terms of technical feasibility, vulnerability, reliability and cost effectiveness, e.g., microwave backhaul versus fiber, and does this vary with respect to aerial or buried plans and different types of terrain? What relative resiliency and reliability characteristics would these or other technologies have in different emergency situations, such as loss of primary grid power or major physical damage to network equipment or other infrastructure?
- How can backhaul redundancy across multiple providers be ensured when communications service providers lease backhaul facilities from other companies?

Emergency communications, particularly 9-1-1 communications networks, generally remained operational during Sandy.

- What obstacles are there to connect to and receive emergency help and what technologies and actions might help? Are there unique obstacles for the elderly or people with disabilities that affect their use and access to communications regarding emergency services?

Communications services took days to recover after Sandy. This not only includes service availability, but service availability at full performance.

- How can the restoration of communications services proceed faster or services remain operational longer? For example, how would changes in availability and prioritization of fuel or other power sources such as generators help, and how could these changes be brought about? How could communications providers be enabled with improved access to important sites like studios, transmitters, central offices, cell sites, public rights-of-way. Should specialized "boomer" cell sites be deployed?
- Why would services, once restored, perform at levels inferior to those customarily enjoyed by users? How long can these performance degradations be expected to last?
- How do communications providers prioritize services and applications during a disaster in which bandwidth is constrained? How are these priorities communicated to users so they can make most effective use of their communications services?
- How has the introduction of broadband technologies into commercial communications networks made them more or less resilient to major weather events like Sandy?
- Do the elderly and people with disabilities, and other communities, have needs that require additional attention?

Users of communications services appear to lack information about the performance of the services they pay for.

- Do consumers have enough access to information about their communications services during emergencies? What additional information would help consumers? For example, would it help consumers to know the performance and reliability of the companies' service or devices as compared to competitors during past emergencies?

General observations.

- What steps can be taken to connect people better and more effectively to each other and to information in emergencies, via mobile, landline, satellite, broadcast, cable, social media or otherwise, and are there any laws or regulations that may require changing to accomplish this?
- What role can libraries, community centers and schools play as temporary communication centers? How can service providers help them serve that role more effectively?

A full schedule of the public hearings will be released in the near future.

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