

Remarks of Robert G. Dawson
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FCC Independent Panel
Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks
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I applaud the FCC for undertaking this effort to address the nation's disaster preparedness in terms of communications network reliability and ramifications for first responders; and thank the FCC and Nancy Victory for this opportunity to provide information to facilitate this goal.

SouthernLINC Wireless is a commercial wireless carrier serving approximately 300,000 subscribers in the major metro and rural areas of Alabama, Georgia, southeastern Mississippi and northwest Florida, including the Mississippi coastline that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. SouthernLINC uses Motorola's iDEN technology, which allows phone, push-to-talk and many other features to be offered in one device.

Additionally, SouthernLINC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Southern Company—a Fortune 500 company with 40,000 megawatts of electric generating capacity and 26,000 employees. Southern Company is one of the largest producers of electricity in the United States, and parent company of Mississippi Power, Alabama Power, Gulf Power, Georgia Power, and Savannah Electric. Together, they provide electricity to four million customers.

Due to its exceptional resilience during and after Hurricane Katrina, SouthernLINC not only served as the primary means of communications for the massive effort to restore electric service in the region, but was often the only means of communications for thousands of rescue workers.

Within days of the storm, SouthernLINC activated nearly 2500 new phones for use by the Mississippi National Guard, the US Coast Guard, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, and other government agencies and public service entities.

At a high level, SouthernLINC's success can be attributed to extensive pre-planning, excellent execution of a well-defined plan, and a spectacular response by our employees.

While SouthernLINC's network does not cover the devastated Louisiana coastal region, it does cover the Mississippi coastline. And it's worthy of note that if taken alone, the destruction in Mississippi would still represent one of the greatest natural disasters in US history. It's hard to comprehend the utter destruction without seeing it in person.

To begin to understand the scope of Katrina, you must view the mile after mile of desolation and debris where cities and homes and businesses once stood. The Mississippi Sun Herald reports that just in Mississippi 236 people were killed, over 65,000 homes were destroyed, and over \$125 billion dollars in property damage was incurred. In the aftermath, the storm left 44 million cubic yards of debris and over 40,000 people sheltered by the Red Cross.

Almost one-million Southern Company customers lost electricity following the storm, including all 195,000 Mississippi Power customers. Nearly two-thirds of Mississippi Power's transmission and distribution system was damaged or destroyed, its second-largest electric generating plant was flooded, and its headquarters building in Gulfport was damaged so severely it will not be fully operational until late 2006.

However, as Southern Company CEO David Ratcliffe recently explained to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Southern Company starts taking action long before a disaster strikes. For instance, Mississippi Power alone had invested \$7 million in securing equipment and logistical support in the two weeks before Katrina made land-fall. SouthernLINC is built from this same DNA.

Communication is crucial in responding to disasters. In addition to SouthernLINC Wireless two-way radio and phone service, Southern Company maintains satellite phones, microwave links, and satellite Internet service. In this storm as in previous ones, however, SouthernLINC served as the primary means of communication for the electricity restoration effort.

SouthernLINC is built to the standards required for our electric business with considerable redundancy. Because SouthernLINC remained largely operational during and after the storm, power was restored to all the customers of Mississippi Power that were physically capable of taking electric service in just 12 days following Katrina's land-fall.

The ability of Mississippi Power to communicate allowed for efficient establishment and operation of staging areas, and the procurement of food, shelter, fuel and security. This allowed the 1,250 employees of Mississippi Power to be joined by 11,000 workers from 23 states and Canada in a coordinated effort to restore power—all within days of the storm. These workers were provided housing, food, tetanus shots, and whatever possible to make life more comfortable for them in six full-service tent cities erected as their temporary homes. Mississippi Power was also able to secure and provide 140,000 gallons of fuel to 5,000 trucks every day, as well as 30,000 meals per day.

It was also extremely rewarding to hear countless stories from SouthernLINC employees and customers that were able to help individuals contact their loved-ones to let them know that they were unharmed by the storm, including rescue personnel working in the damaged areas.

While the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the electric facilities of Mississippi Power was substantial, the impact on SouthernLINC's network was less significant. In fact, all of our towers remained intact.

The electronic equipment at two of our cell sites was destroyed by flood waters--even though the shelters had been built on platforms at heights that exceeded the flood plain established by Hurricane Camille in 1965. Nevertheless, communication in the areas covered by these two sites was restored within days by bringing in portable cell site equipment along with back up generators.

On the second day after Katrina's land-fall, all of our Mississippi sites briefly went out of service. This was caused when certain equipment failed to automatically switch to take power from a standby generator. We were able to restore service in two hours by manually switching the equipment to the stand-by generator power source.

Connectivity to a number of other sites was temporarily disrupted by other factors, including damaged leased ILEC circuits, and breaks in company owned fiber cables. Southern Company employees were able to repair the fiber within hours, and to bypass the leased ILEC circuits by installing microwave equipment within days. The impact of these combined issues caused 25 to 50% of our tower sites to lose service intermittently just after the storm. But within days, the network was functioning at near pre-Katrina levels.

I would note that the pace of restoration for ILEC circuits is still a concern, and there may be room for improvement in the coordination between wire-line carriers and FEMA.

An additional impact of Katrina was discovered shortly after the hurricane. We became aware that our customers whose phone numbers included a 228 area code were unable to receive non-SouthernLINC phone calls—presumably due to a problem in the ILEC network. This problem was resolved by issuing these customers a second, toll-free telephone number. SouthernLINC did this proactively and contacted these customers to inform them of their additional phone number.

In addition to repairing damaged facilities, a communications company must make provision for the increased system usage that follows a disaster. In the weeks after the hurricane's land-fall, traffic on our network increased three hundred percent. The immediate impact was an increase in the number of blocked calls at our cell sites. In the days that followed the hurricane, while many providers still had no service in the region, SouthernLINC added over 100 base radios to our network to adequately address the increased demand.

Why did SouthernLINC perform so well through Hurricane Katrina? Well, the network was constructed with particular attention given to the need of an electric utility to restore power quickly after storm-related events.

Cell sites were built with redundant electronic components, and towers were built to withstand winds of 100 miles per hour--even if covered with a half-inch of ice. Moreover, generators were installed at almost every tower site to maintain power until the commercial electric source is restored. And while it would not be practical, and may be impossible, to design and build a network to meet every contingency that nature could create, SouthernLINC continually works to further improve the geographic and physical diversity of transport to our cell sites and to remove as many single points of failure as possible.

Motorola should also be given credit for developing the robust iDEN technology, which importantly continues to be refreshed and improved over time.

Preparation is another key factor in our success. SouthernLINC's first experience with hurricanes came shortly before the network even went commercial when hurricanes Erin and Opal made land-fall in 1995. Since then, we have responded to approximately 25 named storms--as well as fires, tornados and ice storms--all of which enabled us to refine our emergency preparations and response capabilities.

I am particularly proud of the storm preparation that took place before Hurricane Katrina, which took advantage of lessons learned from Hurricane Ivan in 2004. With this past experience in mind, we completed the filling of fuel tanks early, trained groups of employees for immediate post-storm inspections, and staged people and spare equipment—such as cell site equipment, phones, batteries and vehicle battery chargers--in appropriate locations before the storm.

We also improved our processes on securing hotel facilities to support field forces needed for restoration and inspection activities. And we worked before the storm with public safety agencies and electric utilities to understand what their communications needs would be after the storm made landfall.

However, the primary factor for SouthernLINC's success during Hurricane Katrina was the men and women of the company who put lessons learned into action, who were physically present to fix what broke in a timely manner, and who stayed focused--even when some of them had personally sustained damage to their own homes, or had family members that had been affected. I could not be more proud of the response by our employees in this unprecedented storm.

The rebuilding of the Mississippi coast is ongoing, and it will be a long time before things return to a sense of normalcy. Some of our employees are still working in makeshift offices, and overcoming incredible obstacles every day. Our employees' response to the storm has demonstrated a strong culture of teamwork, and embodied our company's "Southern Style" credo of unquestionable trust, superior performance and total commitment, as well as our "Target Zero" safety goal: "Every Day, Every Job, Safely."

It is not surprising in light of the performance that I have discussed that a significant portion of SouthernLINC's customers are public safety organizations, including law enforcement, fire-fighters, and emergency management personnel.

We partner with these customers by, for example, coordinating network outages for maintenance with their scheduling priorities. And we benefit greatly from the help we receive from these customers during disasters. For instance, we may need assistance when accessing storm damaged areas to repair sites or deliver phones.

Additionally, we maintain close relationships with our suppliers of the propane fuel we use to power the back-up generators at our cell sites, and they work closely with us to maintain fuel levels until commercial power is restored.

While I have focused today on Hurricane Katrina's impact on SouthernLINC and Southern Company in Mississippi, I want to stress that the storm's impact in Alabama and Florida was also considerable. And Katrina was followed closely by Hurricane Rita, which again affected the SouthernLINC region, and spurred calls for Southern Company line crews to travel to Texas to assist recovery efforts there. And while attention was focused on the Gulf, preparations were underway to react to Hurricane Ophelia, which was threatening Savannah on Georgia's Atlantic coast. All of this needed to be addressed in addition to the normal operation of the rest of our system.

In conclusion, to our knowledge, no communications network outperformed SouthernLINC during this disaster—not even so-called Project 25 public safety communications systems. The performance of the SouthernLINC Wireless network during and after Hurricane Katrina's landfall proved that a well designed and properly operated commercial system can meet many of the needs of public safety and critical infrastructure providers. This is accomplished through the right level of partnership between the commercial provider and critical first responders.

SouthernLINC's performance validates the recommendations in the 1996 report given to the FCC by the Public Safety Wireless Advisory Committee, which evaluated the wireless communications needs of federal, state, and local public safety agencies through the year 2010.

Among its recommendations, the Committee encouraged the use of commercial services--provided that the essential requirements of coverage, priority access, system restoration, security, and reliability are met.

Our Katrina experience makes very clear that an appropriate public/private partnership built around a commercial system like SouthernLINC can provide an economically viable and readily achievable solution to meet the current communications needs of vital public safety, emergency management and critical infrastructure first responders, and can practically adapt to meet these needs as they evolve in the future.

It may not be possible to produce this kind of public/private partnership in every area of the United States, but our experience has proven that it can work in the Southeast, and I believe it could be successful in other parts of the country if given serious consideration. I would hope that any action taken by the FCC would encourage such opportunities.

Again, thank you to the FCC and Nancy Victory for giving me and SouthernLINC the opportunity to give input to this incredibly important effort to facilitate disaster preparedness in our nation's communications networks.