

NEWS

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

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

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 10, 2013

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Justin Cole, (202) 210-2437
Email: Justin.cole@fcc.gov

FCC CHAIRMAN GENACHOWSKI ANNOUNCES ACTION TO STRENGTHEN RELIABILITY AND RESILIENCY OF 9-1-1 COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS DURING MAJOR DISASTERS

Based on findings and recommendations of a comprehensive inquiry into widespread 9-1-1 service failures in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic regions as a result of 2012 derecho storm; Final report delivered by the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau

Washington, D.C. – Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski today announced plans to launch a rulemaking to strengthen the reliability and resiliency nationwide of our country's 9-1-1 communications networks during major disasters. Widespread outages and disruptions to 9-1-1 services in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic regions – impacting more than 3.6 million people – led to an in-depth FCC inquiry into what went wrong, and what steps should be taken to better ensure public safety. The inquiry, conducted by the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, included in-depth investigation, public comment and analysis culminating in a report released today entitled “The Impact of the June 2012 Derecho on Communications and Services: Report and Recommendations.”

Chairman Genachowski said, “Americans must be able to reach 9-1-1, especially in times of natural disasters. Today's report on the June 2012 derecho finds that a number of preventable system failures caused major disruptions to communications providers' networks connecting to 9-1-1 call centers during and shortly after the storm. As a result, 9-1-1 was partially or completely unavailable to millions of Americans - in some instances, for several days.

“These failures are unacceptable and the FCC will do whatever is necessary to ensure the reliability of 9-1-1.

“The FCC will soon launch a rulemaking to improve the reliability of existing 9-1-1 networks and prevent failures like those outlined in today's report. We will also accelerate the Commission's Next Generation (NG) 9-1-1 agenda. NG networks harness the power of the Internet to improve the availability and reliability of 9-1-1 communications.

“Here's the bottom line: We can't prevent disasters from happening, but we can work relentlessly to make sure Americans can connect with emergency responders when they need to most.”

About the 2012 Derecho and Impact on Midwest and Mid-Atlantic Regions

The derecho – a fast-moving, destructive, and deadly storm that developed on June 29, 2012 – caused widespread disruptions to communications, especially 9-1-1 services. Shortly after the derecho, Chairman Genachowski directed the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau to conduct an inquiry into the disruptions, including both the causes of the outages and ways to make the public safer by avoiding future outages.

In the report issued today, the Bureau noted that a significant number of 9-1-1 systems and services were partially or completely down for several days after the derecho – from isolated breakdowns in Ohio, New Jersey, Maryland, and Indiana to systemic failures in northern Virginia and West Virginia. In all, seventy-seven 9-1-1 call centers (known as public safety answering points or “PSAPs”) serving more than 3.6 million people in these six states lost some degree of connectivity, including vital information on the location of 9-1-1 calls. Seventeen of the 9-1-1 call centers, mostly in northern Virginia and West Virginia, lost service completely, leaving more than 2 million residents unable to reach emergency services for varying periods of time.

Summary of Report Findings

Unlike hurricanes and superstorms, which are generally well-forecast, derechos are more like earthquakes, tornados, and man-made events for which there is little-to-no advance notice and opportunity to prepare. As such, the derecho provided a snapshot of the reliability and readiness of a portion of the Nation’s communications infrastructure in the face of unanticipated disasters – and it revealed considerable flaws in the resiliency planning and implementation of the primary 9-1-1 network providers in the affected region. In most cases, the disruptions would have been avoided if the communications network providers that route calls to 9-1-1 call centers, had fully implemented industry best practices and available industry guidance.

Summary of Report Recommendations

The Bureau outlined specific suggestions to address the primary causes of the derecho-related outages and to promote the reliability and resiliency of 9-1-1 communications networks during disasters. Chief among these, the Bureau recommended that the Commission consider actions in the following areas to ensure that communications providers:

Maintain adequate central office backup power

The Bureau recommended that the Commission consider requiring communications providers to maintain robust and reliable backup power at their central offices, supported by appropriate testing, maintenance, and records procedures.

Have reliable network monitoring systems

The Bureau recommended that the Commission consider requiring providers to take steps to ensure that communications providers’ monitoring systems are reliable and resilient, and avoid cases where a single failure in a monitoring system causes a provider to lose visibility into a substantial part of its network.

Conduct periodic audits of 9-1-1 circuits

The Bureau recommended that the Commission consider requiring communications providers that route calls to 9-1-1 call centers to regularly audit their 9-1-1 circuits and the links that transmit location information for 9-1-1 calls.

Notify 9-1-1 call centers of problems

The Bureau recommended that the Commission provide more specific guidance, such as the level of information that should be included by service providers in their notifications to 9-1-1 call centers.

The Bureau also encouraged the deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1, which offers advantages over today's 9-1-1 systems that could have significantly lessened the derecho's impact on emergency communications.

In order to complete today's report, the Bureau conducted an extensive review of confidential outage reports, public comments and related documents, as well as interviews of many service providers and PSAPs, equipment and backup power vendors, and public safety and community officials.

As the Bureau was conducting its derecho inquiry, Superstorm Sandy hit the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. While today's report addresses the most significant communications issues that occurred in the wake of the derecho, primarily its devastating impact on the networks that connect 9-1-1 call centers, some information gathered during this inquiry also relates to broader network reliability and resiliency issues raised during Superstorm Sandy. These topics will be addressed in the Commission's upcoming field hearings on the challenges to communications networks during natural disasters and other crises.

The full Report is available via the below link:

http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-318331A1.pdf

FCC

For more news and information about the FCC please visit: www.fcc.gov