



**Statement by Dave Flessas  
Vice President, Network Operations, Sprint Nextel Corp. &  
Member, FCC's Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of  
Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks  
January 30, 2006**

Good morning. My name is Dave Flessas and I am Vice President for Network Operations for Sprint Nextel Corporation.

Sprint Nextel offers a comprehensive range of wireless and wireline communications services to consumer, business and government customers across the Gulf Coast region, throughout the U.S. and around the world.

When Hurricane Katrina made its first landfall in Adventura, Florida on August 25, 2005, only 9 business days had passed since we closed our merger between Sprint and Nextel Communications. Despite that challenge, as a result of strong pre-merger planning, when the storm hit South Florida and later hit the Gulf Coast states, our newly formed company of 80,000 employees came together with a unified and large-scale restoration effort.

#### **Network Disaster Planning Began Before Landfall**

Our Network team's initial response to Hurricane Katrina and its expected service impacts actually began four days before the storm's Atlantic Coast landfall. As part of our emergency plan, hundreds of Sprint Nextel engineers and technicians across the South, conducted their standard list of hurricane preparations – completing checklists at 72, 48 and 24-hour intervals before landfall. As part of this process, crews pre-positioned generators and diesel fuel, readied two-dozen specialty vehicles, and assembled tools and supplies needed to repair damaged electronics and restore service to our customers in the region.

#### **Hurricane Katrina's Impact on Sprint Nextel Wireless and Wireline Networks**

On August 30, the day after landfall in Plaquemines Parish, La., our crews spread throughout the Gulf Coast to begin to recover and restore communications services to the devastated communities. These communities stretched across an area approximately 90,000 square miles – that's just less than the geographic size of Washington, D.C., Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania combined.

Following our initial field inspections, we reported widespread wireless outages on both the Nextel National Network and the Nationwide Sprint PCS Network. In addition, we announced service disruptions to long distance voice and data customers across the region. Along with the total loss of our New Orleans Long Distance Switch and our Biloxi, Miss. POP site, we sustained significant damage several regeneration sites along Sprint Nextel's

fiber route, and numerous wireless sites in the five-state area impacted by the storm.

As we all well know, wireless and wireline network equipment needs commercial electric power to work, and while many Sprint Nextel sites and facilities had backup generators or batteries, heavy flooding destroyed some of those sites. While back up battery power offered some temporary relief to wireless sites without commercial power, the vast flooding across the area made it impossible to deploy generators to the sites after the battery power ran out. Sites facing Telco outages were even harder to bring back on line.

### **Security Concerns And Road Closures Hamper Restoration Efforts**

In addition, as reported in the media, in areas of New Orleans, there were unexpected security issues to contend with, requiring us to conduct restoration work only during daylight hours while accompanied by armed guards we hired to protect our employees and contractors. Further, road closures in the hardest hit areas of Louisiana and Mississippi disrupted our efforts to deploy and refuel cell site generators in the early days of the restoration.

In mid-September, we estimated the financial impact on our company to be between \$150 and \$200 million, net of expected insurance recovery. This estimate included capital and operating costs primarily associated with restoration of network infrastructure and retail operations and billing relief for impacted customers.

But of course the estimate doesn't include the personal and financial costs that more than 500 of my Sprint Nextel colleagues in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida faced in the storm's aftermath, many who were involved in the recovery effort themselves.

### **"Sprint City" Established within 72 hours of Gulf Coast Landfall**

It's important to note that company's response to the storm, wasn't limited to the Network team that I'm a part of. The work of two other groups at Sprint Nextel played significant roles in our ability to promptly restore service to our customers and bear mentioning today.

The first group is Sprint Nextel's Enterprise Incident Management Team or EIMT.

EIMT is the group within the company that oversees the company's disaster response. Within 72 hours after the Gulf Coast landfall, the EIMT deployed a temporary Mobile Command Center with full network and Information Technology capabilities to coordinate the company's massive recovery effort. Located at the Baton Rouge State Fairgrounds, the facility, which our

employees on the ground dubbed "Sprint City", housed our main base of operations in Louisiana.

Spread over several acres, "Sprint City" housed approximately 360 people during the recovery, including network recovery personnel, corporate security, IT, facilities, sales, environmental health & safety officers, business continuity officers, Sprint Nextel's state EOC representatives, a full-time helicopter pilot, a nurse and a mental health counselor.

### **Sprint Nextel Emergency Response Team Plays Critical Recovery Role**

Along with the EIMT's work, our response to the hurricane was greatly aided by the work of Sprint Nextel's Emergency Response Team or ERT. Unique in our industry, the ERT is a small group of communications professionals with extensive emergency communications experience who work side-by-side with public safety and other state and local government agencies in their response and recovery to emergencies or large-scale events. Hurricane Katrina was the 20<sup>th</sup> presidentially declared event that the Emergency Response Team has responded to since the team was formed in 2002.

To help respond to the immediate communications needs of the emergency responders working in the region, within four hours after the Gulf Coast landfall, the ERT arrived in Louisiana with five SatCOLTs – or Satellites Cell on Light Trucks – RVs and thousands of handsets equipped with the traditional Nextel Walkie-Talkie, as well as some enabled with Direct Talk, Sprint Nextel's off-network Walkie Talkie service.

Both services provided first responders critical communications capabilities at a time when the region's wireless networks were disabled by the loss of commercial power and local telephone services – two essential interdependencies needed for wireless communications.

Sprint Nextel is proud that our Emergency Response Team directly supported the work of approximately 75 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, Fire departments, EMS units, emergency management agencies and military units working to help the region recover from this storm. In addition to providing tactical communications (when Public Safety systems were unavailable) and FCC authorized air-to-ground communications for Medivac helicopters, the ERT deployed SatCOLTs to 12 locations including downtown New Orleans and several Parish Emergency Operation Centers.

### **Lessons Learned**

There were many lessons learned over the course of Hurricane Katrina and through subsequent restoration efforts. Through Sprint Nextel's formal Event Analysis program, we have conducted after action reviews across the organization and have identified, documented and are now driving

improvements. These improvement areas run the gamut across the company and beyond -- to vendors, partners and other service providers.

There are five key areas of improvement where Sprint Nextel is focusing significant resources:

- **Cell Site Hardening:** We're focused on ensuring maximum cell site uptime, even during intense storms. As such, additional emphasis will be placed on back up generators and alternative means of transport facilities in areas of significant risk.
- **Business Continuity Planning:** We're going back and reviewing and revising site vulnerability assessments and putting forth additional mitigation plans. Additionally, we are improving our overall command and control structure during storm preparation and restoration to streamline the process and further facilitate service restoration.
- **External Partnerships:** We are reaching out to vendors, partners and other service providers to collaborate on improved ways to respond to these type events. This would include working with power and other telecom providers to help prioritize restoration efforts and develop mutual aid processes.
- **Restoration Processes:** We're reviewing our own restoration process from top to bottom in order to reduce cycle times, improve prioritization methodologies and provide better restoration forecasting.
- **Communications:** This storm certainly tested the industry with regard to communications both within the organization and to external organizations. Sprint Nextel is putting in place more rigor around tactical communications during restoration, but is also focusing on communications externally as well, such as with customers, emergency response agencies, vendors, partners and other service providers to ensure necessary and timely communications.

## Next Steps

There are several industry wide issues that have also been identified:

First, telecommunication carriers need to be designated "Emergency Responders" so that we may receive government assistance and priority access to fuel and other resources from vendors and the federal government during times of crisis. For example, establishing security for employees and facilities delayed our recovery efforts and companies were forced to obtain private security forces. Furthermore, an "emergency responder" designation would allow our crews immediate access to impacted areas to ensure the fastest service restoration possible.

Second, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities of the various government agencies. The National Response Plan was intended to designate the individual roles of the responding government agencies and establish a comprehensive process for managing the incident. However, we believe the

National Response Plan needs to be reviewed, and exercises should be conducted to ensure personnel are trained and issues are identified before a disaster occurs.

Lastly, coordination between telecommunication carriers, power companies, and responding government agencies at all levels needs to be enhanced. Better communication and coordination of response activities would increase the effectiveness of the overall recovery and ensure efforts are focused on the right priorities. The process of reporting status information needs to be efficient and aimed at assisting response efforts.

Several government and industry forums, such as the National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC), the National Coordinating Center for Telecommunications (NCC), and the Service and Network Operations (SNO) Group are also examining this subject. We need to ensure that we are heading in a common direction and are working to resolve issues to be better prepared for the upcoming 2006 hurricane season.

### **Conclusion**

On behalf of Sprint Nextel, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the important work of this Committee.

We recognize, that in the midst of a crisis, all of us on this panel and those that are following the proceedings today want the same thing

Put simply, we want reliable networks. And in times of crisis, we want to minimize service disruptions and restore service as soon as possible.

I look forward to working with my fellow members to help achieve that goal.

Thank you.