



Telecommunications Interdependencies

Issue Background

The Nation's ability to fulfill its national security missions depends on secure and reliable infrastructures. Interruptions or manipulations of vital services—telecommunications, energy, transportation, and banking and finance—would be detrimental to the welfare of the United States. During the mid-1990s, the President acknowledged these interdependencies and encouraged the private sector to actively participate in the protection of critical infrastructures from physical and cyber attacks. The President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) recognizes that uninterrupted or minimally disrupted telecommunications services are indispensable in sustaining other infrastructures' operational capabilities, and it is committed to the continued support of public-private partnerships, as well as information sharing efforts, with other sectors.

History of NSTAC Actions

The NSTAC fosters cooperation and information sharing initiatives across critical infrastructures, including the electric power, transportation, and financial services industries, and has done so for 25 years. The NSTAC first examined infrastructure interdependencies in 1986 when its Telecommunications Systems Survivability (TSS) Task Force initially reviewed the vulnerability of telecommunications to the loss of commercial electric power. Following up on its previous recommendations and a Presidential request, the NSTAC formed the Energy Task Force to conduct a joint study with the electric power industry to examine the interdependencies between electric power and telecommunications after an earthquake.

In 1995, the NSTAC Information Assurance Task Force (renamed the Information Infrastructure Group) began conducting a series of risk assessments on the electric power, financial services, and transportation industries' dependence on information technology and the associated information assurance risks. Working with each respective industry, the NSTAC made recommendations to the President that emphasized the importance of industry/Government cooperation and information sharing.

Recent NSTAC Activities

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the 2003 North American blackout, and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the interdependencies between the telecommunications and electric power sectors became increasingly apparent. The NSTAC Industry Executive Subcommittee formed a task force in the spring of 2005 to investigate NS/EP issues associated with the interdependencies between these two sectors. The Telecommunications and Electric Power Interdependency Task Force (TEPITF) examined NS/EP concerns surrounding operational issues between the two sectors and how these interdependencies would affect the future of the telecommunications network. In January 2006, the NSTAC completed *The NSTAC Report to the President on People and Processes: Current State of Telecommunications and Electric Power Interdependencies*, which addressed the Administration's concerns that telecommunications and electric power interdependencies may create additional vulnerabilities, particularly in emergency response situations. In December 2006, the NSTAC concluded its work and published *The NSTAC Report to the President on Telecommunications and Electric Power Interdependencies: The Implications of Long-Term Outages*, that defined and examined the "long-term outage" phenomenon.