



Emergency Communications

Issue Background

For over 25 years, the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) has worked cooperatively with the National Communications System (NCS) to coordinate the planning of national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) communications to support crisis or disaster recovery. The NSTAC and NCS partnership works to ensure comprehensive preparation for and response to the widest range of such events.

Communications among those responding to a natural disaster, terrorist attack, or other large-scale emergency is an essential component to a successful response and recovery effort. In light of events over the past several years, the need for the Nation's emergency communications systems, plans, processes, and strategies to account for and mitigate the impact of massive communications infrastructure damage remains critical.

History of NSTAC Actions

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the NSTAC formed the September 11th "Lessons Learned" Ad Hoc Group to provide an industry perspective on lessons learned in providing response and recovery of emergency telecommunications capabilities in the wake of the attacks. The group identified nearly 40 policy and operational lessons learned from the September 11, 2001, response, but narrowed its focus to address issues including, access procedures to disaster sites, communications procedures, and industry representation within the National Coordination Center. The group included its analysis in its December 12, 2001, letter to the President.

Recent NSTAC Activities

The destruction caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma posed unprecedented communications challenges and revealed a lack of sufficient operability and interoperability among the multiple public and private response and recovery organizations supporting emergency communications situations. This spurred the need for enhanced communications capabilities, to protect and ensure NS/EP telecommunications in the future. In response, the NSTAC established the Emergency Communications and Interoperability Task Force (ECITF) to develop recommendations regarding short-term interoperability solutions for responders in advance of the 2006 hurricane season. The ECITF initiated an examination of how communications technologies should be integrated into the Federal Government's emergency communications planning to support NS/EP activities and to recommend a future direction to ensure a survivable and interoperable communications architecture for responders. Based on the initial analysis in March 2006, the NSTAC provided short-term recommendations in a *Letter to the President on Emergency Communications and Interoperability (The Letter)*, outlining emergency communications and interoperability issues and identifying immediately applicable actions to improve responder communications capabilities. In January 2007, the NSTAC released the *NSTAC Report to the President on Emergency Communications and Interoperability*, which expanded on *The Letter's* short-term recommendations. The report recommended expansion of NS/EP priority services and use of deployable communications capabilities, identification and integration of critical elements into a national emergency communications strategy, and expansion of NS/EP policy to provide continued support for emergency communications in a converged environment.

For more information on the NSTAC, visit www.ncs.gov/nstac/nstac.html or call (703) 235-5516.