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Federal Communications Commission
National Emergency Numbering Association
Remarks

Charlotte Convention Center
501 South College Street
Charlotte, NC 28202
Monday, June 11, 2007
7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. – Day 3 of 5-Day Conference
(Chief Poarch will speak at approx. 9:00 a.m. following welcoming remarks by NENA leadership)

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be with you today. I want to thank the National Emergency Number Association and your president, Jason Barbour, for the opportunity to participate in today's conference to discuss with you briefly the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau and recent FCC policy developments and initiatives that are important to your membership.

The Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, like your association is committed to promoting an open dialogue with communities, developing sound policies that will help ensure effective and accessible 9-1-1 services for our nation's citizens, and supporting technological advancements that will further strengthen the emergency communications capabilities of Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs), commonly referred to as 9-1-1 emergency call centers.

We respect and appreciate the leadership, dedication and contributions of your 7,000-member organization to public safety and homeland security initiatives over the years.

We are pleased with your organization's ongoing efforts to increase awareness and educate the public about the benefits of 9-1-1 services, including E9-1-1 capabilities.

We support policies that will help ensure that any person dialing 9-1-1 for help receives prompt access to emergency services so that assistance can be provided when and where it is needed, regardless of the type of technology used by the consumer to make the call.

As you can imagine, it's impossible to take public safety issues, like spectrum management, licensing, Enhanced 911, Emergency Alert Systems, or interoperability for public safety communications, and deal with any two of them in the same way. Each issue brings with it very unique and complex factors to consider.

The issues are intertwined, and so are the stakeholders – different levels of government, first responders, emergency call centers, commercial carriers, equipment vendors, and ultimately, the public.

It is also important to acknowledge that communications technology is changing every day, which creates new opportunities for enhancing the capabilities of public safety providers, but also brings new expectations and demands based on what new technology can offer, and the challenges of meeting those expectations and demands for the protection of the public.

We must do more than simply recognize the many new opportunities that technology offers us in today's world. More importantly, we must balance these opportunities for progress with solutions and commitments that address the potential vulnerabilities that accompany such innovation.

One of the Commission's current objectives is to advance policies, rules and initiatives that support the efficient and reliable transmission of location information for wireless cell phone users and voice over internet protocol (or VoIP) customers to Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) that will better ensure rapid emergency response and save lives.

We must do everything we can to ensure that public safety has the information it needs to do its job effectively.

With that said, we appreciate your support for the Commission's adoption of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on May 31st that seeks comment on tentative conclusions related to enhanced 911 location accuracy and reliability requirements for wireless carriers and providers of VoIP services.

The commission supports the idea that wireless Phase II, E911 location accuracy should be measured on the public safety answering point (or PSAP) level.

In addition to clarification of E911 standards for accuracy requirements, the Commission also seeks comment on other tentative conclusions regarding the benefits of establishing a single location accuracy requirement for wireless carriers irrespective of technology, mandatory schedule for accuracy testing and carrier-generated accuracy data to be shared with PSAPs.

We appreciate your support on this important issue and look forward to working with your organization to provide the most accurate information possible to 9-1-1 emergency call centers across the nation.

The Bureau is committed to supporting policies that afford public safety officials the opportunity to update and adapt their emergency communications plans to include the invaluable contributions of 9-1-1 emergency call centers.

We strongly encourage first responders and hospital emergency departments to fully coordinate their disaster planning, response and recovery efforts with their local 9-1-1 emergency call centers, as well as state and local emergency management offices.

A top priority for the Bureau is to coordinate with our Federal and industry partners on restoration of communications services impacted by disasters. Under the federal Emergency Support Function-2 (ESF-2) of the National Response Plan, the FCC supports the National Communications System (NCS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the restoration of communications services impacted by a natural disaster or man-made event.

As part of this role, the Bureau monitors the status of communications services and infrastructure during emergencies. It also supports the efforts of the NCS and FEMA in communications restoration efforts in disaster zones, and coordinates the spectrum needs of public safety organizations and the communications industry during disasters.

The Commission also works closely with NCS and FEMA on emergency preparedness issues.

For example, last year, several Commission engineers, under FEMA's leadership and as part of interagency teams, assisted the States of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama in a comprehensive audit of their communications resources and updates to their emergency communications plans.

This year, the Bureau again is working with FEMA to update these plans and share this information with states in the Southeast and Gulf Coast regions of the nation.

At the direction of Chairman Martin, the Bureau has stepped forward to offer its assistance to the NCS in developing and implementing an emergency preparedness, response and restoration training program to be held in New Orleans later this month.

Our Bureau staff routinely provides expertise and training to a number of governmental entities – local, state, tribal and national – on emergency communications response.

Another priority of the Bureau is outreach. As part of that mission, the Bureau will serve as a clearinghouse for public safety and homeland security information, particularly information on emergency communications planning.

This clearinghouse responsibility includes the development of emergency communications guidance and specialized web pages for various stakeholders to refer to when developing and updating their emergency communications response and recovery plans.

We are also available to offer technical guidance to the public safety community, the health care community, and state and local governments regarding spectrum licensing issues and the use of alternative technologies as part of back-up plans in response to disasters.

As you may know, in May the Commission implemented various recommendations developed by the Hurricane Katrina Panel that will help improve emergency response and assist first responders, the communications industry and all levels of government to maintain operations and communicate effectively with one another during emergencies, disasters and public health threats.

As part of those rules, larger local exchange carriers and commercial mobile service radio providers are required to have emergency back-up power sources for all assets that are normally powered from local AC commercial power, including those in central offices, cell sites and remote switches.

Another important focus of the Bureau is our efforts to help ensure that the Nation's communications network is reliable and resilient. We monitor and analyze network outage information and work with industry stakeholders to address areas that may require improvement.

One initiative in this area is our work with NCS and various segments of industry in developing a database for the collection of outage and other situational awareness information from communications companies affected by disasters.

This information is analyzed and shared with NCS, and can be instrumental in reducing disaster response and communications restoration in the event of a major outage.

On other matters of national importance, and at the direction of Congress under the Warning, Alert, and Response Network (WARN) Act, the Commission established the Commercial Mobile Service Alert Advisory Committee to address issues surrounding the dissemination of emergency warnings and alerts via mobile devices.

This advisory committee is comprised of many industry representatives with expertise in public safety and emergency communications.

The committee has a very important and challenging task: to develop technical standards that will enable the timely transmission of voluntary alerts and warnings to the public via commercial mobile service providers.

We look forward to continuing to work with the committee members and receiving their recommendations on technical standards by October 2007, at which time the Commission will, pursuant to the WARN Act, commence a rulemaking that will consider their recommendations.

The Commission also took action in May adopting an Order that strengthens the nation's Emergency Alert System (or EAS) by promoting the development of fully digital Next Generation technologies and delivery systems that will better serve the American Public.

The Order lays the groundwork for the Next Generation EAS delivery system by requiring participants to accept messages using Common Alerting Protocol in the future. This will better enable the efficient and rapid transmission of EAS alerts to the American people in a variety of formats, including text, audio and video, via different means – such as broadcast, cable and satellite.

As part of our efforts to provide outreach on emergency communications planning to the health care sector, we have increased our dialogue and built stronger relations with the federal Department of Health and Human Services, state and local health departments, and hospitals.

On yet another front, the Bureau is committed to developing and promoting policies that afford public safety officials the opportunity to build nationwide interoperable emergency communications networks.

To ensure interoperability for public safety and the efficient use of available spectrum, we must make tough decisions regarding spectrum allocation and management – we simply must meet the needs of first responders and other public safety entities.

The public safety community and the citizens of this country expect and deserve nothing less than a first class, interoperable, nationwide communications system. Having one will inevitably save lives.

The creation of an interoperable communication network will provide for effective and immediate communications among and between first responders on demand, not just in emergencies, but as part of cooperative communications plans that enable first responders from different disciplines and different jurisdictions to work together to both respond to and prevent disasters.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to share information on the FCC's initiatives with you, and look forward to partnering with you, working together to address these critical issues. There is however one Bureau initiative on which I would like to ask for your immediate help.

As part of our clearinghouse function, the Bureau works with NCS and other Federal Partners, as well as the communications industry, to promote the availability and use of the Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP), the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) and the Wireless Priority Service (WPS) programs by the public safety community, the health care sector and the nation's broadcasters.

During emergency response and recovery efforts, it is vitally important that mechanisms and programs like these are in place to ensure that key personnel can utilize the nation's telecommunications networks to perform their duties.

Where these programs are in place, there is strong evidence that they have made a critical difference in the ability to communicate in the aftermath of a disaster.

For example, in the wake of 9/11, use of the Wireless Priority Service program resulted in call completion rates of over 95% of all calls using that program. Unfortunately, we have found that, in much of the country, there is an underutilization of these programs.

We are asking that you help us promote these programs and increase awareness among 9-1-1 emergency call centers across the nation.

To qualify for TSP, GETS and WPS, an organization must be engaged in activities essential to the nation's security or emergency preparedness and response functions – which includes the promotion of public safety, health, and maintenance of law and order – and rely on telecommunications services to perform their duties.

TSP provides those organizations that have enrolled in the program with priority restoration of their damaged telecommunications circuits so that their critical communications lines are quickly brought back on-line during disaster recovery efforts.

Along with TSP, we urge the various stakeholders to use the GETS and WPS programs as key components of any emergency communications response plan.

GETS works with the use of an access code and Personal Identification Number (PIN) that are printed on a GETS card. In essence, wireline calls made with GETS move near the top of the queue in the telecommunications carrier's system.

This program significantly increases the likelihood – with approximately a 90 percent success rate – that the caller will connect with whom he or she is attempting to reach; particularly when lives may be at stake, time is precious, and the networks are congested.

Like GETS, the WPS program enables the caller to move near the top of a wireless telecommunication carrier's network queue when making an emergency call and the network is congested. Again, enrollment in this program increases the likelihood that the call will go through quickly.

We have more information on these programs on our Bureau web site, and we are glad to assist organizations seeking guidance on enrollment in these priority service programs. I encourage all qualifying agencies to apply for participation.

Each of you serve an important role in helping to maintain and improve the availability and reliability of effective emergency services and communications.

Protecting our nation from man-made disaster, and responding quickly to meet the needs of Americans in harm's way, is the highest calling for all of us. With your help, we can further strengthen our national communications infrastructure and provide 9-1-1 emergency call centers and public safety with the communications tools they need to get the job done.

When police officers respond to a mass casualty event, when firefighters rush into a burning building to save children or when paramedics arrive on the scene of an accident to render care to trauma victims it is very often the work of 9-1-1 emergency call center operators that make all of the difference in the world. It is the prompt and expedited handling of these 9-1-1 calls that helps ensure a rapid response and potential life-saving intervention on the part of America's first responders.

All of us must keep this in mind when addressing these critical issues. We must never be accused of being innocent bystanders. There simply is too much at stake.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be with you today.