Tips for Communicating in an Emergency

To ensure that your telephone call gets through to family, friends and loved-ones during an emergency or disaster, here are things to consider:

> *It is important for consumers to keep in mind that during an emergency, many more people are trying to use their wireless and wireline telephones at the same time when compared to normal calling activity. When more people try to call at the same time, the increased calling volume may create network congestion.*

Recommended Practices for All Users

1. Limit non-emergency phone calls. This will minimize network congestion, free up "space" on the network for emergency communications and conserve battery power if you are using a wireless phone;
2. Keep all phone calls brief. If you need to use a phone, try to use it only to convey vital information to emergency personnel and/or family;
3. Try text messaging, also known as short messaging service (SMS) when using your wireless phone. In many cases text messages will go through when your call may not. It will also help free up more "space" for emergency communications on the telephone network;
4. If possible try a variety of communications services if you are unsuccessful in getting through with one. For example, if you are unsuccessful in getting through on your wireless phone, try a messaging capability like text messaging or email. Alternatively, try a landline phone if one is available. This will help spread the communications demand over multiple networks and should reduce overall congestion;
5. Wait 10 seconds before redialing a call. On many wireless handsets, to re-dial a number, you simply push "send" after you've ended a call to redial the previous number. If you do this too quickly, the data from the handset to the cell sites do not have enough time to clear before you've resent the same data. This contributes to a clogged network;
6. Have charged batteries and car-charger adapters available for backup power for your wireless phone;
7. Maintain a list of emergency phone numbers in your phone;
8. If in your vehicle, try to place calls while your vehicle is stationary;
9. Have a family communications plan in place. Designate someone out of the area as a central contact, and make certain all family members know who to contact if they become separated;
10. If you have Call Forwarding on your home number, forward your home number to your wireless number in the event of an evacuation. That way you will get incoming calls from your landline phone;
11. Be sure that you have at least one corded telephone that is not dependent on electricity in case of an electrical power outage. Cordless telephones usually will not work if there is a power outage.

Recommended Practices for People with Disabilities

1. Register with your local Police Department. Remind them to keep a record of the help you may need during an evacuation, power outage or other emergency;
2. If you have a Personal Care Attendant, work with that person to decide how you will communicate with each other, such as by cell phone, if you are separated during an emergency;
3. Consider getting a medical alert system that will allow you to call for help if you are immobilized in an emergency. Most alert systems require a working phone line, so have a back up such as a cell phone or pager if the landlines are disrupted; and
4. Learn about devices such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), text radio, pagers, etc. that can help you receive emergency instructions and warnings from local officials. Tip: Learn about NOAA Weather Radio for the hearing impaired.

Visit Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) website at http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/specialplans.shtm for more information.

Recommended Practices for Communications Providers

1. Work with local emergency services personnel and large communications users (e.g., enterprise customers and campus environments) to develop plans for managing communications surges during emergencies;
2. Have procedures in place for provisioning additional capacity rapidly to areas that are experiencing surges in demand for communications services due to emergencies. These procedures are especially important for trunks that interconnect local switches with 911 tandems;
3. Include information in billing/marketing distributions to customers advising them of practices that they should follow when trying to communicate in an emergency;
4. Work with 911 call centers to help design and implement solutions that will enable them to manage heavy call volume during emergencies;
5. Ensure that critical 911 circuits are registered with Telecommunications Service Priority to expedite restoration of service;
6. Consider placing and maintaining 911 circuits over diverse interoffice transport facilities (e.g., geographically diverse facility routes, automatically invoked standby routing, diverse digital cross-connect system services, self-healing fiber ring topologies, or any combination thereof); and
7. Move network access away from the 911 tandem during surge events that accompany an emergency.

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