

### In the event of a national disaster

As the workshop participants worked together to clarify how telecommunications incident response management occurs in the event of a national disaster, the group agreed that the National Response Plan (NRP) would go into effect and guide their actions. Under the NRP, the NCC, a part of the NCS, coordinates information sharing to the Joint Field Offices (JFO) and the State Emergency Management Offices (SEMO). For example, in a national disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina, JFO and SEMO worked together to collect and coordinate information from a variety of critical infrastructure sectors; telecommunications information would only be one area about which data is collected. The mechanism for collecting and disseminating information for all critical infrastructure (CI) sectors is dictated by the NRP. The NCS, working with colleagues in both public and private sectors, keeps the President and all necessary individuals posted regarding the response and restoration activities.

The workshop participants agreed that the roles and responsibilities as documented through the NRP provide a model for information sharing and disaster management in the event of a national incident (further details about the national and other regional collaboration models are located in Appendix 3 Current Practice Review.) The question remains, however, to what extent might a similar model be relevant when an incident was localized to either a specific geographic area or jurisdiction beneath the federal radar?

### In the event of a state or regional disaster

The participants agreed that in the event of a local, regional, or state disaster, the NCS may not receive detailed information about the incident or play a role in the response. According to NCS officials, the NCS watch center tracks those local events that catch their attention; however, they are only alerted or called into action when an event is identified as threatening an asset related to national security or emergency preparedness (NSEP). In the event of a regional or localized telecommunications incident, the NCS may not mobilize their members or mobilize only for information purposes; therefore information may not be disseminated by the NCS to the many different local entities that cross the organizational sectors.

## Below the national or state radar

As the participants revealed these important distinctions in the nature of disasters of both national and non-national interest, they pushed their conversation further to examine the information flows and the roles and responsibilities of various organizations from national, state, regional and local levels. Many of the workshop participants raised concerns about roles, responsibilities, and non-duplication of services. Less clear to the participants was who is responsible at what point in time in the event of an incident. This lack of clarity about responsibility, or “who is in charge” at the regional level, echoes findings in the President’s National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) Report to the President on the National Coordinating Center (May 10, 2006), which was used as background for this project.

In the event of a national or state-wide emergency, the National Response Plan (NRP) and the State Emergency Response Plan (SERP) are called into effect; however, in regional or local incident response, according to the participants, there is currently no coordinated information sharing plan. In the absence of a cohesive, regional information-sharing plan there is the potential for duplication of information and increased complexity in the coordination of various actors.

A key point highlighted by the participants is that real-time data and cross-organizational information sharing are even more significant in the smaller, localized events where only one critical infrastructure is involved. Participants noted that certain local events may fall under the radar of even a regional coordination effort. However, they identified the importance of keeping the appropriate government officials informed so they can reassure and advise the public in a time of crisis.

## Importance of data and contextual knowledge

Participants repeatedly emphasized the value of accurate, sufficient data and contextual information sharing in a time-sensitive environment; receiving detailed information quickly becomes especially important in regional, multi-state, or multi-jurisdictional responses. A telecommunications incident response can be severely hindered if the response team lacks this granularity of data along with the contextual knowledge of the region. As an example of the value of contextual knowledge, one of the participants discussed the potential for underestimation of regional implications of an event. “If, say a telecommunications call center in Dallas, Texas became aware that electric service was down in the Palisades cliff area of New Jersey, it might not appreciate the potential impact to telecommunications in that region. Regionally remote call centers would likely have limited knowledge about what

that service outage means to the local service technicians in a geographic area such as the cliffs of the Palisades, a 550-foot-high precipice along the west bank of the Hudson River in Bergen County, New Jersey and Rockland County, New York. The call center attendee, without knowledge of this geographic area, might not fully appreciate the logistical challenge of this response, nor the implications for telecommunications services in NYC, Westchester, and Northern New Jersey.”

In one participant’s view, this type of regional knowledge is imperative for decisions concerning resource distribution, response time estimates, and supplying special equipment in response to an incident. Participants stressed the importance of having knowledgeable workers as near to the ‘ground’ as possible. Creating a “clearinghouse” for information was another important aspect of improving both the quality of the data and the speed with which it could be delivered. Sharing information alone would not help refine the response; knowing what information was important within the context of where the incident occurred and what items are needed for restoration of service was viewed as being equally valuable as the sharing itself. This focus on local expertise is also consistent with the National Response Plan’s view that “the lowest jurisdictional level” possible should provide incident response.(2) Accomplishing this vision effectively means responders will need timely, accurate information.

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(2) “A basic premise of the NRP is that incidents are generally handled at the lowest jurisdictional level possible. Police, fire, public health and medical, emergency management, and other personnel are responsible for incident management at the local level. In some instances, a Federal agency in the local area may act as a first responder and may provide direction or assistance consistent with its specific statutory authorities and responsibilities. In the vast majority of incidents, State and local resources and interstate mutual aid normally provide the first line of emergency response and incident management support.” (National Response Plan, page 15.)