



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

DA 11-328

February 17, 2011

Kathleen M. Grillo
Senior Vice President
Public Affairs, Policy & Communications
Verizon Communications
1300 I St. NW, Room 400W
Washington, DC USA 20005

Re: Failed 9-1-1 Calls During January 26, 2011 Snowstorm

Dear Ms. Grillo,

The FCC has received reports that during the snowstorm that hit the Washington D.C. region on January 26, 2011, approximately 8,300 wireless 9-1-1 calls to the Montgomery County Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), routed over the Verizon network, were not connected, and an additional 1,700 wireless calls to the Prince George's County PSAP were not connected. I know that you will agree that any 9-1-1 call which is not connected can have serious consequences, but the large number of missed 9-1-1 calls on January 26 is truly alarming. I therefore request that Verizon provide an explanation of the causes of this and similar failures, provide Verizon's assessment of the possibility of occurrence in other locations and describe what actions Verizon is taking to prevent recurrence of these problems.

Here is a synopsis of what we understand so far. Through our initial discussions with various parties, including representatives of Verizon, we have learned that the Montgomery County PSAP has fourteen trunks that handle wireless calls, seven each from the Rockville and Hyattsville Selective Routers. The trunks from these Selective Routers to the PSAPs are maintained by Verizon (not Verizon Wireless), and there are separate trunks for wireline, wireless and VoIP calls. At approximately 5:15 p.m. on January 26, Verizon's system automatically took one of the wireless 9-1-1 trunks out of service. It is our understanding that this was not an overload. We understand that it is normal in large-scale emergencies for the call volume to exceed the trunk capacity, in which case calls will be blocked until another trunk opens up. In this instance, however, the Verizon system took each of the fourteen trunks handling wireless calls out of service sequentially so that they could not receive any more calls. By 8:45 p.m., the problem had cascaded to the other thirteen 9-1-1 trunks handling wireless calls, so that all of the trunks handling wireless 9-1-1 traffic in Montgomery County were taken out of service by the system.

These trunks have working alarms, but Verizon did not notify the PSAPs of the failure after the alarms went off. The Montgomery County PSAP recognized the problem just prior to 11:00 p.m. and notified Verizon. By 11:15 p.m., Verizon had placed all the trunks back into service.

Similarly, eight of the ten trunks that serve wireless calls for the Prince George's County PSAP were taken out of service automatically by Verizon on January 26 by approximately 8:30 p.m. A ninth trunk was taken out shortly thereafter. Four were restored by 10:30 p.m.; all trunks were finally restored by approximately 11:00 p.m.

It is not clear what caused these individual trunks to be taken out of service. Your experts have postulated that the increased call volume resulting from the snowstorm created a timing problem on the trunks which caused them to be automatically taken out of service. However, the Private Branch Exchange (PBX) in the Montgomery County PSAP is a relatively new CS1000E, which has the speed and capacity to handle the number of calls that were being routed. The Prince George's County PSAP's PBX is older, but since the PBX has fewer trunks connected to it, the PBX should be able to handle the call volume. The slow response of the PBX's does not appear to be the cause of the failures.

I would note that the events of January 26 are not unique and that other similar 9-1-1 outages have occurred recently in the region. On December 17th, 2010, the Prince George's County PSAP and on July 25, 2010, the Montgomery County PSAP experienced similar outages. The July 25, 2010 incident resulted in delayed urgent medical attention for a caller who was unable to reach 9-1-1. In all cases, Verizon did not notify the PSAPs when the outages occurred. Instead, the PSAPs became aware of the outages only when they received complaints from callers or were notified by another PSAP. The PSAPs then notified Verizon.

We are particularly concerned that this problem may be widespread across Verizon's footprint. We therefore request that Verizon investigate the extent of the problem across its network and provide the following information by March 10, 2011:

- Is this problem localized to the PSAPs off the Hyattsville and Rockville Selective Routers?
- Was this the same problem that occurred in Fairfax County, Virginia on January 26, 2011?
- Can this problem occur elsewhere in the nation?
- Has this problem occurred in other states and if so, in which states?
- Has this problem occurred with other brands of PBXs? Can it?
- Has this problem occurred when Centralized Automatic Message Accounting (CAMA) trunks are not used?

- Has this problem occurred only with certain types of Selective Routers?

In addition, we request that Verizon recommend potential remedial actions, including:

1. How Verizon will prevent trunks from being taken out of service during high calling events.
2. How Verizon will monitor the trunks to the PSAP and notify the PSAP when the trunks fail or are taken out of service. Verizon needs to explain how any new procedures ensure that the PSAPs are notified in a timely manner.
3. How Verizon can provide the PSAPs with their own monitoring capability. The PBX in the PSAP may be able to provide ongoing trunk statistics. Alternately, the PBX should be able to provide ongoing counts of wireline 9-1-1 calls and counts of wireless 9-1-1 calls.
4. Whether Verizon can use equipment other than CAMA trunks to connect Selective Routers to the PSAPs. The PBXs in the Montgomery County PSAP and Prince George's County PSAP have the capability to handle IP traffic.

The ability to call 9-1-1 is critical to the safety of the public. This is especially true during extreme weather events. The public rightly expects that they can use 9-1-1 to reach the appropriate first responders in an emergency. In addition to your written response, I request a meeting with appropriate representatives from Verizon within the next two weeks to discuss your resolution of this matter. Your office can contact Chantal Virgile at chantal.virgile@fcc.gov or (202) 418-0056 so that we can schedule the meeting at a mutually convenient time.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Arden Barnett, Jr.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James Arden Barnett, Jr.
Rear Admiral, USNR (Ret.)
Chief, Public Safety & Homeland Security Bureau

cc: Nneka N. Ezenwa
Federal Regulatory Affairs
Verizon Communications