

Derecho Storm Leads to FCC 911 Inquiry

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The June 29 "Derecho" storm brought significant damage and power outages to the Mid-Atlantic region. It also brought a number of high-profile 911 outages, which have attracted the FCC's attention. This week, the Public Safety Bureau launched a broad investigation into the Derecho events.

In the wake of the Derecho, news media reported outages in the 911 system in several counties in Northern Virginia and an West Virginia. The Public Safety Bureau quickly announced that it would begin meeting with carrier representatives, public officials, and others to investigate the outages. (This was similar to the Public Safety Bureau's reaction to [Verizon 911 outages in 2011](#).) Now, the Bureau has expanded its inquiry with an 8-page [Public Notice](#) seeking comment on the "reliability, resiliency and availability of communications networks in times of emergency." The Public Notice was accompanied by a last-minute addition to the agenda of yesterday's FCC's Open Meeting to discuss the inquiry. Four of the Commissioners released statements [praising the Bureau's inquiry](#).

The Public Notice suggests that the FCC is approaching the Derecho from a rulemaking perspective, rather than an enforcement perspective. That's great news for Verizon and Frontier Communications, of course, as the two local telephone companies providing services in the areas hit by the outages. (Again, this is similar to how [the Bureau approached the 2011 Verizon outage](#). The Maryland PSC investigation of the same outage, by the way, has stalled. No orders have been entered since the October 2011 staff recommendation that we discussed.)

The Public Notice requests comment on a broad range of issues:

- **Causes of Outages.** The Public Notice asks for comment on the specific causes of the outages related to the Derecho storm, and asks several questions related to whether "best practices" were followed in preparation for the storm. More broadly, the Public Notice asks what forms of network interconnection were affected and "to what extent are there industry best practices addressing forms of interconnection and diversity and redundancy?"
- **Effect on 911 Systems and Services.** The Public Notice focuses on improvement to the reliability of the 911 network in storms such as this. It asks, among other things, whether 911 facilities are deployed redundantly and whether 911 selective routers are deployed in a diverse manner.
- **Effect of 911 Outages.** The Public Notice also seeks comment on the impact the outages had on the public and whether alternative means to reach public safety officials were available.

Finally, the Public Notice asks two pages of questions concerning "911 Resiliency and Reliability Generally," touching upon issues concerning the deployment of Next Generation 911 (NG911) networks, "virtual PSAP" facilities, text-to-911 and other matters pending in a variety of 911 dockets.

Clearly, the Bureau is casting a wide net in this Public Notice. Virtually every 911 issue parties are pushing today is implicated in some way or another by this notice. We can't wait to see if parties take the Bureau up on the invitation when comments are due in mid-August.