Emergency Restoration of Public Safety Communications Systems
(Draft)

I. Introduction

The lack of operability in communications facilities dedicated for first responder communications seriously impeded the response to Hurricane Katrina. Existing communications systems operated by local law enforcement and fire/rescue services were disabled by the loss of electrical power or infrastructure components. Alternative commercial technologies provided some measure of relief but, for the most part, lacked capacity or functionality to allow first responders to carry out their duties as effectively as possible. Available Federal Government communications assets were not utilized as to the maximum extent possible.

Recommendations dealing with the immediate restorations of emergency communications networks are among the most important to be considered by this panel.

II. Recommendations

1. The FCC should encourage state & local jurisdictions (on a statewide of regional basis) to retain and maintain a cache of equipment components that would be needed to immediately restore existing public safety communications within hours of a disaster.

    a. At a minimum, the cache should include the necessary equipment to quickly restore communications capabilities on all relevant mutual aid channels. Such a cache would consist of: 1) RF gear, such as 800 MHz, UHF, VHF, Mutual Aid, IP Gateway, and dispatch consoles; 2) trailer and equipment housing; 3) tower system components (antenna system, hydraulic mast); 4) power system components (generator, UPS, batteries, distribution panel); and 5) fuel.

    b. The cache should be maintained in a location protected from disaster impacts.

    c. The cache should be maintained as a regional or state-wide resource and allocated through the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

    d. The cache should be managed by State Emergency Management Agencies with the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) providing the mechanism for sharing the assets.

    e. The cache should be included as an element of the National Response Plan.

2. The FCC should publicize to public safety licensees alternative communications technologies to provide communications when normal public safety networks are down (as back-up or drop in). Such technologies include satellite telephones, mesh networks, and two-way paging devices. Most importantly, public safety agencies should be reminded/encouraged to train and use such devices prior to emergencies.

3. The FCC should work with DHS and NCS to develop an inventory of available Federal Government and military communications assets that can be rapidly deployed in the event of a catastrophic event. This information should include the steps necessary for requesting the deployment of these assets. The FCC should also consider creating a list (web site perhaps) of private industry assets that would be available either for contribution or for sale.