

TELEPHONE SERVICE OUTAGE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS STRENGTHENED
(CC DOCKET 91-273)

The Commission today adopted revised standards for reporting telephone service outages as part of its ongoing efforts to improve the reliability of the nation's telecommunications networks. Telephone outages are infrequent in this country, but when they occur, outages can cause the loss of telephone service to a large number of users and have a potentially devastating effect on the businesses and people involved. Telephone outages may disrupt the lives of millions of consumers, cause economic loss, or even threaten life and property.

In the order adopted today, the Commission amended its telephone service outage reporting requirements by reducing the number of potentially affected customers from 50,000 to 30,000 as the baseline for reporting telephone service outages lasting over 30 minutes to the FCC. Use of the lower threshold will triple the number of central offices that would be required to report outages. The Commission also required the reporting of outages affecting "special offices and facilities," such as major airports, 911 facilities, nuclear power plants, major military installations and key government facilities, regardless of the number of customers affected. The new rules also require that in their outage reports carriers list, and evaluate, the effectiveness of relevant industry best practices or standards that are described in the report issued June 10, 1993, by the Commission's Network Reliability Council (NRC).

In addition, the Commission will require carriers to notify the management of any 911 facility of an outage affecting the facility. It will also require the reporting of fire-related incidents affecting 1000 or more service lines.

Most of these changes were recommended by the NRC, a broad-based group that includes industry leaders and consumers. The Commission created the NRC to provide recommendations for avoiding or minimizing the impact of public telephone network outages. In January the Commission renewed and revised the NRC's charter to address emerging issues related to increased interconnection of new and different kinds of telecommunications service providers to the public telephone network, including cable television and wireless service providers.

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The Commission asked the newly-expanded NRC to take under advisement the issues of whether reporting of outages affecting 911 and other special facilities should include other entities, such as satellite and cellular carriers; whether and how a funding structure for the Internetwork Interoperability Test Plan should be designed; and whether customers of carriers are adequately informed of service outages.

The outage reports will be analyzed by the FCC to determine whether the best practices for ensuring network reliability, identified by the NRC, are being implemented by carriers and whether they are effective in reducing telephone service outages. They will also ensure that carriers are aware of best practices. Finally, the reports also will be analyzed and shared among the telecommunications industry by the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions, a telecommunications industry group.

Action by the Commission July 14, 1994, by Second Report and Order (FCC 94-189). Chairman Hundt, Commissioners Quello, Barrett, Ness and Chong, with Commissioner Barrett issuing a separate statement.

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