



Emergency Mobile Telecommunications:

Regulatory Best Practice

Background

- Access to communications services is critical to emergency response and recovery. Facilities based communications service providers (“operators”) and equipment makers are central to disaster response efforts.
- Emergency situations pose unique challenges that vary greatly based on geography, pre-disaster telecommunications infrastructure, government institutions, and regulatory design.
- The ability for operators to quickly establish, or re-establish, communications services after a disaster depends on how quickly technical and relief staff and equipment to provide power, local access and backhaul connectivity, can be brought to and set up in the impacted areas.
- Depending on the circumstance, operators may need to repair or replace damaged infrastructure, establish emergency transmission and backhaul systems, adjust power levels and cell contours, among other activities, within the shortest possible timeframe.
- To ensure emergency communications services are established without unnecessary delay, regulatory frameworks or clear operational guidelines, at all government levels e.g. local, regional and/ or national should be established before a disaster strikes and provide for operational flexibility, spectrum, and infrastructure sharing, and innovation, albeit on a temporary basis.
- In countries where the relevant issues in case of disasters are not already regulated or defined in national laws, the following position may apply.

Industry Position

- Governments, along with relevant multilateral agencies, and operators should agree a set of regulatory guidelines that can be adopted to best respond to and recover from an emergency or disaster. In addition, Governments can convene multi-stakeholder discussions to foster the continuous development of best practices that account for the dynamic nature of emergency communications and technologies.

- The guidelines should set out unambiguous rules and clearly defined lines of communication between all levels of governments and operators in emergency situations. For example, operators may require temporary permission to increase the maximum power range of a transmitter to maintain coverage in the face of a damaged nearby transmitter. If there is no clear mechanism for seeking such permission, and if it is not clear which agency, and which official within that agency, have authority to grant such permission, emergency response will be delayed or prevented. However, if a government has established either a clear, quick, and transparent method for gaining permission, or a process whereby explicit permission is not necessary in such emergencies, then operators will be able to respond effectively and in a timely manner, knowing who the decision maker is, and communications services will be available more quickly.
- The guidelines should provide operators with flexibility to adjust to unforeseen circumstances rather than insisting that rules designed for non-emergency situations apply, no matter the circumstance. For example, allowing operators flexibility with how they use their assigned spectrum frequencies, during the course of the emergency and recovery, so long as it does not cause interference to other users, allows operators to quickly adjust networks to match the needs of the affected population in a disaster. Also, reporting requirements on outages and restoration activities should be balanced to inform the response but not be too prescriptive to put undue resource pressure on operators or detract from their ability to prioritise restoration.
- The guidelines should help improve communication and coordination among various government entities involved in responding to an emergency and facilitate a timely and efficient response. In particular:
 - Regulators and emergency management agencies should establish clear lines of communication and determine how telecommunications fits into a larger local, regional, and/or national response effort before an emergency occurs;
 - Regulators and customs and immigration agencies should build an emergency response plan that allows fast-track approvals for equipment importation and entry of credentialed personnel;
 - National-level agencies should establish clear lines of communication with regional and local agencies on telecommunications matters to prevent working at cross purposes or sending mixed or conflicting messages to operators;
 - Government should encourage third parties such as electricity and power companies, and operators to cooperate with one another to use available resources intelligently and efficiently, for example allowing for infrastructure sharing and facilitating access to international connectivity; and
 - Wherever feasible, joint industry/government disaster recovery drills and/ or simulations should be considered to detect potential issues in existing plans.

Resources:

[GSMA Disaster Response](#)

[Humanitarian Connectivity Charter](#)

[DEWN: Dialog's Disaster and Emergency Warning Network](#)

[Disaster Response: Mobile Money for the Displaced](#)

[Business As Usual: How AT&T deals with Natural Disasters](#)

[GSMA Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy in the Use of Mobile Phone Data for Responding to the Ebola Outbreak](#)