

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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November 19, 2012

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Upton and Chairman Walden:

The massive “superstorm” that recently struck the East Coast affected millions of lives, decimated communities, and caused billions of dollars in damages and lost business throughout the Northeast. Communications services failed to perform as needed during and after the storm. In the aftermath of the storm, power outages and floods disrupted many types of communications, including wireless, television, telephone and Internet services.¹ The Federal Communications Commission reported that the storm knocked out a quarter of the cell towers in an area spreading across ten states.²

These reports concern us because first responders and relief agencies rely on these communications networks to coordinate rescue and recovery efforts. These networks also allow citizens to request emergency services, to contact and reassure concerned family members, and to begin the process of rebuilding.

¹ *UPDATE 2-Hurricane Sandy disrupts Northeast US telecom networks*, Reuters (Oct. 30, 2012) (online at www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/30/storm-sandy-telecommunications-idUSL1E8LU5EX20121030).

² *Sandy takes out 25 pct of cell towers*, The Wall Street Journal (Oct. 30, 2012) (online at online.wsj.com/article/AP348620cbc6e540638cf1476ec3bc2870.html).

In a disaster, network outages and loss of coverage are not merely matters of inconvenience; they put lives at risk. We are therefore writing to request that you hold a hearing on the impact of the storm and the reliability of communications services. This is especially important because scientists predict huge storms like Sandy will become more common as a result of unchecked climate change.

Press accounts and anecdotes provide an incomplete picture of our communications infrastructure during and after the storm. A hearing would allow us to investigate the reliability of the communications networks, to identify and highlight best practices and, where necessary, to address potential vulnerabilities in our communications infrastructure.

One issue we should examine is the performance of wireless and fiber-optic networks, which for many households are becoming their main means of communication. Indeed, AT&T and Verizon have recently announced plans to phase out support for traditional copper-line networks.³ We are concerned by accounts suggesting that those with corded telephones running on copper-line networks were able to communicate while those relying on wireless services or fiber-optic cables were not.⁴

Sadly, this is not the first time extreme weather events have uncovered vulnerabilities in our communications networks. Last summer, a storm knocked out 911 and other communications services for many people in the Mid-Atlantic area.⁵ Each of these extreme weather events threatens to expose additional vulnerabilities in our communications infrastructure.

We cannot predict the time or location of the next disaster, but we know that these disasters are happening with increased frequency as carbon emissions build in the atmosphere. We should do everything we can to prepare for future catastrophes. We therefore urge you to hold a hearing on this topic as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee

Anna G. Eshoo
Ranking Member
Communications and Technology
Subcommittee
Energy and Commerce Committee

³ *AT&T, Verizon Phase Out Copper Networks, 'A Lifeline' After Sandy*, Huffington Post (Nov. 9, 2012) (online at www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/09/att-verizon-sandy_n_2094302.html).

⁴ *Id.*

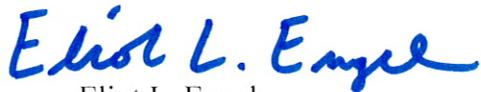
⁵ *FCC to look into Verizon's 911 outages*, Washington Post (July 18, 2012) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/fcc-to-look-into-verizons-911-outages/2012/07/18/gJQABKgZuW_story.html).



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