

USA Mobility, Inc.

Highlights of the Report of the FCC's Independent Panel on Hurricane Katrina

On June 19, 2006, the FCC's Katrina panel released its detailed report on the hurricane's impact on telecommunications networks. **The panel had strong praise for the utility of paging, and it issued multiple recommendations to the FCC that specifically mention paging.** Some excerpts from the report:

"Paging systems seemed more reliable in some instances than voice/cellular systems because paging systems utilize satellite networks, rather than terrestrial systems, for backbone infrastructure. Paging technology is also inherently redundant, which means that messages may still be relayed if a single transmitter or group of transmitters in a network fails. Paging signals penetrate buildings very well, thus providing an added level of reliability. Additionally, pagers benefited from having a long battery life and thus remained operating longer during the power outages. Other positive observations concerning paging systems included that they were effective at text messaging and were equipped to provide broadcast messaging. Finally, although it is unclear whether this function was utilized, group pages can be sent out during times of emergencies to thousands of pager units all at the same time." (Report, p. 10)

"Two-way paging operations remained generally operational during the storm and did provide communications capabilities for some police, fire [and] emergency medical personnel, but could have been more widely utilized." (p. 24)

"The FCC should work with and encourage each industry sector ... to develop and publicize sector-specific readiness recommendations ... [including] developing and practicing a communications plan to identify 'key players' and multiple means of contacting them (including alternate communications channels, such as alpha pagers, [etc.]." (p. 31)

"The FCC should take steps to educate the public safety community about the availability and capabilities of non-traditional technologies that might provide effective back-up solutions for existing public safety communications systems. Examples of these technologies would be pagers, [etc.]" (p. 32)

"To facilitate the restoration of public safety communications capabilities, the FCC should ... [u]rge public safety licensees to familiarize themselves with alternative communications technologies to provide communications when normal public safety networks are down. Such technologies include ... two-way paging devices, and other technologies less reliant on the PSTN." (pp. 37-38)

The Katrina panel called on the FCC to support Department of Homeland Security efforts to make emergency medical providers eligible for funding for emergency communications equipment (p. 40). In addition, the panel urged the Commission to

move quickly to complete its pending proceeding on the Emergency Alert System and endorsed the goal of broadening EAS to include wireless services (p. 40). USA Mobility, Inc. is participating in the EAS rulemaking, because (i) the one-to-many broadcasting capability of paging is a natural fit with the requirements of emergency alert messaging, and (ii) we believe that inclusion of paging in the expanded EAS will add value to our service offerings.

The FCC also released a notice of proposed rulemaking seeking comment on the panel's recommendations. That proceeding will provide another opportunity to raise the profile of paging, to reiterate its public safety advantages, and to promote its expanded use in emergency communications.

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