

Five Years Ago

Posted August 30th, 2010 by [Jamie Barnett](#) - Chief, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau



As the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina is here, we are faced with a strong swirl of emotions and memories. The unprecedented devastation that the Hurricane wrought was compounded by organizational troubles from many quarters. As painful as it is for America, I want us to remember the death and destruction inflicted on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. I want us to remember the bravery and determination of the people who suffered through it. And I want us to remember the valiant first responders, volunteers, members of the armed forces, and others who worked to save lives and property. It is important that we not forget any of this.

As I and our FCC staff members reflect on the anniversary of this American tragedy, we consider lessons learned and how we have worked to ensure the tragedy and devastation of Katrina are not seen again. I was not at the FCC in 2005, but I am proud of the response of the FCC during Katrina. In fact, the White House Lessons Learned document that was issued following Hurricane Katrina expressly recognized the FCC for “What Went Right” and the Commission was cited for acting quickly to facilitate the resumption of communications services in affected areas and authorizing the use of temporary communications for emergency personnel and evacuees.

Despite our success at response, we also recognized that there are things we can improve. First, while the FCC was well-prepared for most emergency events, we learned the importance of having a formal incident management system to manage the required FCC response to an emergency of the magnitude of Katrina. Accordingly, the FCC quickly worked to create a new Bureau, the [Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau](#), where emergency response and incident management could be resident.

Further, we have been actively engaged—from the top-down, to improve our ability to respond to any major public emergency. For example, the FCC, working with its licensees and regulated entities developed the [Disaster Information Reporting System](#) (DIRS), which provides the communications sector a web-based tool to share operational status and restoration information on service outages.

Information collection and analysis at the FCC-Headquarters level, while important, also needs to be matched with a commitment of personnel on-the-ground. Accordingly, the FCC deployed full-time Regional Communications Liaison Specialists to FEMA Regions IV and VI to establish close working relationships with and obtain the support of state, tribal, and local public safety officials as well as regionally deployed Federal agency representatives before major disasters occur. During emergencies, these Liaison Specialists will serve as primary FCC first responders in the disaster area, supplemented by FCC Headquarters and field office emergency trained personnel.

Additionally, the Liaison Specialists will perform duties under the FCC's spectrum monitoring [Roll Call Program](#). Roll Call is a spectrum monitoring system that analyzes wireless transmissions and matches them to licensing records. Information gathered pre-event is then matched to scans conducted right after an event, such as a hurricane, to identify critical licensees that may have lost communications capabilities and then to locate and deploy resources to get these licensees back on the air.

To manage these emergency programs, the FCC has implemented a scalable Incident Command System that starts at the Division-level, and then can be used by the Bureau- and Commission-level as the event or incident requires.

While the FCC family contemplates Katrina's legacy and the toll Katrina imposed on our brothers and sisters in the Gulf Region, we continue to rigorously plan, prepare, train, and exercise so that when the next blow, expected or not, comes, we stand ready to respond with alacrity to do our part to save lives and protect property.