



Search

ON AIR NOW » Hurricane Irene Coverage Rick Folbaum & Ainsley Earhardt

3a^{et}



FOX & Friends Weekend (cc) Special Live coverage of Irene! 5a^{et}

Fox News Extreme Weather Center Hurricane Watch Rise of Freedom



POLITICS

Quake Exposes Post-9/11 Cracks in Cellphone Coverage, Emergency Response

By Judson Berger Published August 24, 2011 | FoxNews.com

Print Email Share Uhfpx p hgg 568

64 7



Tuesday: People in lower Manhattan after being evacuated from buildings following the Virginia earthquake.

As dazed workers streamed out of evacuated office buildings Tuesday following an earthquake along the East Coast, many resorted to Tweet, email and text to communicate with the rest of the world.

In the immediate aftermath of the 5.9 magnitude quake, cellphone service was a traffic jam.

The constipated wireless networks in the D.C. region and beyond were a glaring example of how the country has failed to correct the shortcomings in emergency

communication 10 years after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.



Tuesday: Staff of the Embassy of Ecuador wait outside after an earthquake damaged the building in Washington, D.C.

First responders were able to get by using radio on Tuesday. But spotty cellphone coverage would have prevented them from sharing vital photo and video in a more serious situation. And the service disruption was a reminder to everyday users that, in an emergency, loved ones could very well be in the dark about their well-being.

Wireless providers downplayed the severity of the disruption, which Washingtonians repeatedly described as eerily similar to that terrifying day 10 years ago.

Verizon described it as short-lived. But the [Federal Communications Commission](#) called the problem "significant," particularly when it came to people trying to dial 9-1-1.

"We are very concerned by incidents where emergency wireless calls to 9-1-1 after yesterday's earthquake were hampered by network congestion. Thankfully, there have been no reports thus far about serious injuries or lives lost. Nevertheless, these are the moments when mobile phone service is needed most -- and disruptions puts lives at risk," FCC Public Safety & Homeland Security Bureau Chief Jamie Barnett said Wednesday. "We are in contact with wireless carriers and public safety call centers in affected areas to determine the cause of reported outages in an immediate effort to identify and address the problems."

Sean Kirkendall, senior policy adviser with the Public Safety Alliance, said the East Coast got "lucky" this time. But he said the quake aftermath should light a fire under lawmakers sitting on proposals to create a separate communications

RELATED STORIES

- The Tweet That Shook the World
- Magnitude 5.8 Earthquake Hits Virginia, Sends Shockwaves Throughout East Coast
- 5.8 Magnitude Earthquake Disrupts East Coast Transportation
- Earthquake Damages Washington National Cathedral
- Ten Nuclear Plants Declare 'Unusual Event' After Earthquake
- Two Nuclear Reactors Taken Offline Following 5.8 Magnitude Earthquake in Virginia

together for greater savings. HOME PHONE + INTERNET

STARTING UNDER \$36/mo FOR 12 MONTHS

SHOP NOW

1-year price guarantee on select services.

LATEST POLITICS VIDEOS



Will Economy Ever Recover?



Is Romney on the Ropes Already?

More Videos

FOLLOW FOX NEWS POLITICS

@foxnewspolitics

Ohh

67/c: 9#hredchh#k1v#Eh#kch#l#w#e# # r#x# # ihggy1

MILITARY HEALTH CARE

More

Where Have All the Reagan Republicans Gone?

War wounded face long limbo period to leave military under new disability evaluation system

Study Questions Important Heart Failure Trials

Utah's forgotten veterans receive military funeral as part of national initiative

SPONSORED BY

REACHING YOUR GOAL

Aol.

Man Could Be Charged For Dancing On Grave

RELATED VIDEO



D.C. Reacts to Quake

Buildings evacuated after tremor

RELATED VIDEO



Earthquake Rattles East Coast Residents

Seismologist offers insight on Virginia quake

Sponsored Links

Home Phone - \$99 Per Year

Unlimited calling to US/Canada. 40+ Features. Free activation. <http://www.VOIPo.com>

Get Athena Pheromones

Get more romantic attention! Biologist Dr. Winnifred Cutler's... www.athenainstitute.com

[Buy a link here](#)

network for public safety officers.

"This is just another reminder that it's very real," Kirkendall said. He said it's important that first responders be able to transmit images of injuries and property damage, something that would have been difficult on Tuesday.

A stronger public safety communication network was recommended by the Sept. 11 commission, which in the months after the attacks called for "expedited and increased assignment of radio spectrum for public safety purposes." The commission noted that "the inability to communicate" was a critical problem after the Sept. 11 strikes.

While advances have been made in radio, public safety officials have pressed for improved wireless services. That effort, though, has run into political and practical hurdles in Washington.

The FCC had been working on a proposal to auction airwaves to a commercial carrier for public safety purposes, but the agency hasn't found a qualified bidder and public safety groups strongly object. Groups like the PSA instead want the federal government to simply allocate part of the wireless spectrum for public safety.

One such proposal, by Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Sen. [Jay Rockefeller](#), W-Va., has already cleared out of committee.

"We would still like to see that bill on the floor of the Senate before 9/11," Kirkendall said.

But Congress is on recess, and its agenda upon return is likely to fill up fast with economy-related items. Plus, Kirkendall noted some in the House of Representatives have reservations.

Critics of allocating the spectrum note that an auction would raise needed money for the Treasury. Additional spectrum has also been allocated for public safety purposes since 2001, but Kirkendall said they need more.

Public safety officials were not complaining about the jammed wireless lines on Tuesday. FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate said that first responders could still use email and portable radios. He said congestion on wireless networks is anticipated when so many people at once are using cell phones. Fugate said families need to have a backup communication plan in the event of an emergency.

Dan Schmidt, a spokesman with the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department in northern Virginia, said the department used radio despite the "cellphone capacity issues."

"Our radio systems were fine," he said.

Still, he said, "anything we can do to improve emergency communication for first responders is something we totally support."

The FCC is working on another plan, called Next Generation 9-1-1, to improve communication for emergency responders. Another FCC plan established a system to allow mobile device users to receive targeted text messages about safety threats.

Meanwhile, spotty cell coverage triggered criticism from a competing generation of communication.

"Policymakers debating spectrum policy ought to take note that the one reliable communications service during today's earthquake was the original wireless technology -- free and local broadcasting," Dennis Wharton, vice president of the National Association of Broadcasters, said in a statement. "It's easy to get dazzled by iPads and [Smartphones](#), but all the spectrum in the world won't ensure reliability of the 'one-to-one' cellphone network architecture during an emergency."

Print Email Share [Uhfrrp p hgg](#) 568

64

RECOMMENDED STORIES

[Creationism Hits the Campaign Trail and Exposes Differences in the Field](#)

[Man's Best Friend Stays Loyal to Fallen SEAL](#)

[Perry Topples Romney as Frontrunner, But Stays on Offense](#)

ALSO ON THE WEB

[Young Americans: Luckiest Generation in History \(YOLOHUB\)](#)

[Love & Marriage: Throw Him Back: 3 Ways to Tell He's NOT for You \(MadameNoire\)](#)

[Gibson Defends Its Guitar Wood After Federal Raids \(The Atlantic Wire\)](#)

[VOTE: Should A Pennsylvania School Be Allowed To Ban Skinny Jeans?](#)

[WATCH: Thief Stuffs Snakes In Pants](#)

[That's A Lot Of Candles -- World's Oldest Person Celebrates Birthday](#)

[Police Use Stun Gun On Man Who Reported Own Parking Violation](#)

TRENDING IN POLITICS

1 [Seeds of Discontent for Bachmann in Iowa; Told to Cut the 'Barack Obama Rock Star Crap' - Fox News](#)

2 [Gallup Poll Shows Tea Party Prefers Perry - Fox News](#)

3 [State Department: Don't Invade Privacy of Cleric on CIA Kill List](#)

4 [Qaddafi Regime Offered Kucinich All-Expense Paid Trip to Libya to Broker Peace](#)

5 [Officials: Qaddafi May Have Lied About Daughter's Death in '86 Bombing](#)

[See all trends >](#)

REAL CLEAR POLITICS POLL

Job Approval	Approve	Disapprove	Spread
Obama	43.8%	52.2%	-8.4%
Congress	16.0%	78.2%	-62.2%
Direction of Country	Right Direction	Wrong Track	Spread
RCP Average	18.6%	74.4%	-55.8%