

AT&T Testimony
Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee and
Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Management
Informational Hearing
Southwest Power Outage
October 26, 2011
San Diego City Council Chambers, 202 C Street, 12th floor
2:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Good Afternoon. My name is Steve Casey. I am a Vice-President of Construction and Engineering for AT&T. I have responsibility for AT&T's network reliability and operations for Southern California.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

I will provide you with an overview of the impact of the far-reaching commercial power outage on AT&T's network and our response during this emergency.

This unprecedented outage affected an extensive geographical area – entire counties of San Diego and Imperial as well as parts of Orange and Riverside counties. Our local Emergency Operations center acted quickly to implement processes on a real time basis to respond to changing conditions as the outage continued.

I will detail some of those actions in a moment, but first I want to provide an overview of the performance of AT&T's network during the outage.

AT&T has many facilities in the region that were impacted when the commercial power failed on that Thursday afternoon.

AT&T has 63 switching offices and hundreds of cell towers as well as other network facilities in the footprint of the outage.

AT&T switching Offices in the affected area continued to operate normally to connect customer calls. Our main central offices have very large generators that worked as they were designed and we had no problems on our Core Wireline network.

This is significant since both Wireline and wireless calls are routed through these offices.

AT&T's VoIP and Internet service also performed well. Equipment that powers AT&T's U-Verse Voice over Internet service and High-Speed Broadband service have built in backup batteries in the event of a commercial power outage.

At the peak of the power outage, about 99% of these AT&T services were operational.

AT&T's wireless facilities – essentially our cell towers - were impacted by the commercial power outage. The majority of

our cell sites have back-up power and automatically switched to the back-up power source.

In the immediate aftermath of the power outage, AT&T's wireless network experienced a huge spike in calls when thousands of people left work at the same time and began their commute home and everyone got on their phone.

Our call volume was much higher than normal and there was congestion on the network. Customers experienced service degradation due to the congestion.

We monitored our network throughout the power outage to determine trouble spots. There was disruption of our network due to heavy usage and to loss of power at cell sites. The network did not go down.

Our network processed hundreds of thousands of call, texts and e-mails during the many hours of the commercial power outage.

Our emergency procedures went into affect at the first sign of trouble.

As you know, as part of its normal procedures, when SDG&E activated its emergency operations center, it notified the California Utilities Emergency Association (CUEA). As a member of CUEA, AT&T worked closely with this team to coordinate our efforts.

We were actively engaged with SDG&E during the entire duration of the commercial power outage to make decisions that would enable our network to function with the highest reliability possible.

As I mentioned earlier, the scope of the commercial power outage posed some unique challenges. But we immediately implemented our emergency procedures.

Our field operations teams in each market have processes and equipment in place to handle emergencies.

These include resources such as access to all available technicians, spare parts, truck mounted generators sized to power individual cell sites as well as access to cell towers on wheels in the event a tower is damaged and causing an outage.

Our battery back-up is designed to power a cell site for 8 hours under optimal conditions. The actual duration of back-up power is subject to the amount of power draw at the site including heavy usage and other power requirements.

Almost of our cell sites that have limitations for permanent back-up power are plumbed for generator hook-ups so we can bring in and activate back-up power when needed.

The extensive geography of this outage required AT&T to aggressively pursue every avenue to maintain our wireless network.

We implemented procedures to deploy generators to sites without power which include sites that carry a high volume of traffic or that cover a wide area.

As I mentioned, we have our own generators, but needed additional units due to the widespread nature of the power outage.

Because of the heavy demand on generator vendors in the immediate area, we contacted vendors in surrounding counties and had additional generators secured and dispatched to San Diego.

We also prepared for and arranged for additional generators to be sent in from around the state in anticipation of an extended outage.

As sites that were working on battery back-up began to lose power due to the duration of the outage, our field operations team closely monitored where SDG&E was restoring power and redeployed generators to other sites as needed.

We continually monitored and assessed where to move and deploy power resources to provide the best network coverage.

And we planned and deployed delivery of fuel to sites with generators to ensure they continued to provide power as the outage continued.

We are committed to providing a high level of service to our customers and to ensure customers have the ability to communicate during times of crisis.

We continually analyze our processes and performance to enhance our restoration and response. And as we've done in the past, we use experience from every incident to identify any new practices or responses that will better serve our customers.

We have assembled a special taskforce from all areas within our business to analyze this emergency and make recommendations company wide that will enhance our network performance.

Thank you for your attention. I'm happy to answer any questions.

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