

UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF NUCLEAR REACTOR REGULATION
OFFICE OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDS
WASHINGTON, DC 20555-0001

December 6, 2023

NRC INFORMATION NOTICE 2023-06: EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES
CHANGES

ADDRESSEES

All holders of an operating license for a nuclear power reactor under Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR) Part 50, "Domestic Licensing of Production and Utilization Facilities," including those that have permanently ceased operations and have certified that fuel has been permanently removed from the reactor vessel, independent spent fuel storage installations under 10 CFR Part 72, and fuel-cycle facilities under 10 CFR Part 70, Subpart H or 10 CFR Part 40.

PURPOSE

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is issuing this information notice (IN) to inform licensees of potential near-term impacts to site Emergency Telecommunications Services (ETS) because of updates to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) infrastructure requirements. FCC-19-72A1 granted all telecommunications carriers the authority to decommission legacy telecommunication infrastructure that supports plain old telephone service (POTS) copper-based technologies using time-division multiplexing (TDM). These lines are critical to ensuring that dedicated circuits and equipment relied upon to maintain connectivity with NRC are in place in the event of an emergency. Telecommunications carriers will no longer provide support to the current systems in place, potentially affecting ETS connectivity between NRC and licensees.

The NRC is issuing this IN to inform licensees of alternatives that the NRC is considering with regard to its obligations under § 305 of Energy Reorganization Act of 1974 (as amended by Public Law 96-295). The NRC expects that recipients will review the information for applicability to their facilities, as appropriate. INs may not impose new requirements, and nothing in this IN should be interpreted to require specific action.

BACKGROUND

Public Law 96-295 required the NRC to establish and maintain "a mechanism for instantaneous and uninterrupted verbal communication" with licensees; however, no specific technology was mandated. Since the law was enacted, the NRC has provided nuclear power plants and emergency operations facilities with reliable long-distance telephone service to meet the requirement through the installation of direct access lines (DALs) that use the POTS, copper-based TDM infrastructure.

Based on the FCC decision, the infrastructure that supports the installed DALs is at risk of being decommissioned by telecommunications carriers, which could impact NRC-provided telecommunications services at all operating reactors, independent spent fuel facilities, fuel-cycle facilities, and decommissioning power reactor sites.

Newer technologies, such as fiber optics or wireless, have made this legacy technology no longer economically sustainable for providers to maintain. Compounding the issue, much of the equipment is obsolete and supporting technicians have retired, making repairs costly. Furthermore, with the FCC decision, the solution to use TDM switching may no longer be supported.

However, existing emergency communication requirements are still applicable. Though not all are required by law for all facilities, licensee systems supporting Incident Response Program communications that could be impacted include Emergency Notification System, Health Physics Network, Reactor Safety Counterpart Link, Protective Measures Counterpart Link, Management Counterpart Link, and Operations Center Local Area Network.

The NRC issued Regulatory Issue Summary (RIS) 2000-11 (RIS 2000-11) (ML003727812) in 2000, which allowed licensees to voluntarily utilize their corporate network as outlined in the attachment to the RIS, for ETS, rather than rely on NRC's provided solution.

What you should know

All licensees will be contacted by the NRC within 90 days of the date of issuance of this IN to discuss the available alternative solutions that will ensure available communications. The NRC will work with licensees to transition to an alternative communications solution, including consideration of how changes could impact licensee emergency plans under 10 CFR 50.54(q)(3) and 10 CFR 72.32. As a mitigation measure, NRC will provide licensees with Government Emergency Telecommunication Services cards. This will provide licensees with call prioritization in the event of a regional or national emergency.

The alternatives are:

1. Licensees utilizing their own networks (see RIS 2000-11; ML003727812).
2. NRC replacing existing telecommunications services with currently supported infrastructure such as POTS via Asynchronous Digital Subscriber Line, or Voice over Internet protocol (VoIP).
3. NRC providing POTS Replacement via 5G/4G/LTE carrier-provided responder networks to support communications (e.g., FirstNet or Frontline).

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT STATEMENT

This IN does not contain new or amended information collection requirements that are subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501 et seq.). Existing requirements were approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under approval numbers 3150-0011, 3150-0132, and 3150-0151.

Public Protection Notification

The NRC may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a request for information or an information collection requirement unless the requesting document displays a currently valid OMB control number.

CONTACTS

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NAME	KWilliams	RFelts				
DATE	12/5/2023	12/6/2023				

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