



## Government Emergency Telecommunications Service and Enhanced Call Completion Studies

### Issue Background

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The Nation increasingly relies on telecommunications to carry out national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) functions, and it is imperative that critical networks remain in operation for key response personnel during emergencies, such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack. The public switched network (PSN) remains vulnerable to outages and congestion, both of which can prevent NS/EP officials from communicating. To help mitigate these risks to the PSN, the National Communications System (NCS) developed and currently operates the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS), which provides emergency access and priority processing in the local, long-distance, and Government-leased segments of the PSN. The President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) regards assured access to the PSN as an important NS/EP component and monitors the effects of new technology and convergence on priority network access. As of September 30, 2009, the Federal Government had issued 244,341 active GETS cards.

### History of NSTAC Actions

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In December 1990, the NSTAC completed its initial investigation into the issue of assured access to the PSN. Its final report concluded that the Government required an enhanced call completion (ECC) program for NS/EP traffic. Successive NSTAC inquiries revealed that a High Probability of Call Completion (HPC) standard would improve the ability of an NS/EP call identifier to provide call-by-call preferential treatment. The NSTAC subsequently tasked an ad hoc group with assisting the Government in obtaining approval of the HPC standard and coordinating the development of ECC demonstration scenarios.

In 1993, the White House directed the NCS to work with the NSTAC Funding and Regulatory Working Group (FRWG) to assess the regulatory issues resulting from the implementation of ECC attributes. Specifically, the FRWG examined whether prohibitions of undue preference in the *Communications Act of 1934* would necessitate Federal Communications Commission (FCC) action to enable NS/EP personnel to have special access to priority calling features. The NCS, after consulting with the NSTAC, asked the FCC to issue a legal opinion. Following a month of public comment, the commission informed the NCS that, since the Federally-managed GETS program already included lawful tariffs, a ruling on the 1934 statute's bearing on the preferences afforded by GETS was irrelevant.

As new technologies emerged, NSTAC's analyses of GETS became more complex. Through its Information Technology Progress Impact Task Force, for instance, the NSTAC studied GETS functionality in Internet protocol networks and concluded that those networks may not support the activation of GETS access and transport control features.

### Recent NSTAC Activities

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The NSTAC continues to study how network convergence and the implementation of new program changes affect the GETS program. Participants in the integration session of NSTAC's 2004 Research and Development Exchange Workshop cited GETS as a successful industry/Government initiative, and expressed interest in extending the service into the next generation networks.