



Critical Telecommunications Facility Protection

Issue Background

The need for standardized guidelines in requesting protection for critical telecommunications facilities was identified during the April 1992 civil disturbance in Los Angeles. Telecommunications companies reported difficulties in obtaining protection for their facilities, and there was widespread confusion about whom to contact, because points of contact changed once the President declared the crisis a Federal emergency. It was determined that processes need to be in place to obtain protection for critical facilities during civil disturbances.

History of NSTAC Actions

In September 1993, the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) convened a National Security and Emergency Preparedness (NS/EP) Panel to work closely with the National Coordinating Center for Telecommunications (NCC) on the development of guidelines to assist emergency planners during their preparations for and response to civil disturbances. The NS/EP Panel met with California State, Federal Government, and telecommunications industry representatives in San Francisco, where meeting participants generally agreed that emergency response personnel were not sufficiently prepared to respond to the crisis that overwhelmed local law enforcement and fire protection services. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Defense representatives also briefed the panel on the roles of the DOJ, the National Guard, and active duty military personnel during national emergencies.

In close coordination with the California Office of Emergency Services and the California Utilities Emergency Association, the NCC and the NS/EP Panel issued *Guidelines for Obtaining Protection of Critical Telecommunications Facilities During Civil Disturbances*. The document, completed in May 1994, serves as a guide for telecommunications industry emergency planners when discussing their facility protection needs with local, State, and Federal authorities. The document underwent further revisions based on exercises and further discussions on the issue, including adding procedures for transitioning from Federal control back to State control, discussing the legal aspects of federalized versus non-federalized troops, and clarifying the role of National Guard troops.

Recent NSTAC Activities

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, there has been increased attention on critical facilities' vulnerabilities to attack from terrorists, as well as insiders. During the NSTAC XXVI Cycle (March 2002-April 2003), the NSTAC Vulnerabilities Task Force (VTF) studied issues related to the consolidation of assets in telecom hotels. Two of the major conclusions of its study on telecom hotels are that the Government's responsibility to protect domestic facilities from aggression and acts of violence must be clearly defined, and both industry and the Government need to share the responsibility in mitigating risks. The VTF also studied trusted access to telecommunications facilities, which included the consideration of procedures for controlling access and authenticating personnel to disaster areas.