



Telecommunications and natural disasters

Six things you should know

1. No form of communications is 100% resilient to disasters

Although Australia has some of the most reliable mobile and fixed line networks in the world, no form of communications should be solely relied on. While you may rely on being able to make calls or on accessing apps, websites and social feeds to receive updates during emergencies and natural disasters, remember that these could become unavailable without notice. You should have multiple communication options ready to use such as a portable battery powered radio or a satellite phone.

2. Telecommunications services are reliant on power

Without power, your home phone, internet modem, laptop, or mobile phone may not work. To prepare for this, you should consider back up power options such as battery packs for mobile devices.

Sometimes telecommunications infrastructure, such as mobile base stations, will lose power in a natural disaster. When this happens, even if your mobile phone has battery, the network may be down and you will not be able to make or receive calls. You also might not be able to access information or communicate via the internet (websites, apps etc).

If you lose power to your home or business premises but have telecommunications services, your home phone and internet modem may not work. However if you have a back-up power option such as a battery pack you may be able to use mobile devices such as laptop, tablet or mobile phone.

3. You may not receive Emergency Alert messages during an emergency or natural disaster

Emergency Alert is the national telephone warning system used by emergency services to send voice messages to landlines and text messages to mobile phones within a defined area about likely or actual emergencies. However, Emergency Alert relies on telecommunications networks to send messages, and message delivery cannot be guaranteed. Emergency Alert is just one way of warning communities and should not be relied on in all circumstances.

4. Telecommunications networks can be overloaded during an emergency or natural disaster

When a natural disaster occurs, the first instinct is to contact your friends and family. However, large volumes of calls, messages and internet usage simultaneously can result in an overloaded telecommunications network, which means that critical calls may not get through. Where possible, only make voice calls that are urgent eg. to contact triple zero or emergency services if you need help. You should also try to avoid non-essential use of wireless internet, particularly sending pictures and video.

5. Telecommunications carriers are responsive to outages but may not be able to restore services for some time

Telecommunications carriers are responsible for their network operations and try to restore services as quickly as possible. Depending on the outage and natural disaster, temporary facilities or portable generators can be deployed to provide connectivity in the interim. However, there may be circumstances outside their control which impede their ability to restore services, including access to infrastructure where it is remote and located in rugged terrain.

6. Learn how your telecommunication devices and services work

Many of us rely on digital devices and technology in our daily lives to stay connected but not everyone understands how they work. As part of your preparedness plan, you should get to know your devices and services and understand how they work, including their limitations and vulnerabilities. This will help you plan for an alternative communications means in the case of telecommunications or power outages.

For more information on how to prepare for a telecommunications outage during a natural disaster, visit – www.communications.gov.au/STAND