



Communications during emergencies

Summary of what to do

- Plan your communication options ahead of time.
- Keep your mobile charged and have a backup power source, if possible.
- Monitor local radio, television and the local emergency service website for up-to-date warnings and information.
- Have access to a portable battery powered radio.
- Consider alternate devices such as PLBs and/or satellite phones.
- Follow Emergency Alert messages when received.

The Australian Government understands the importance of having communications access, particularly during emergency situations.

The government and telecommunications industry actively plan for emergency situations.

However, regardless of best efforts by all parties no communications technology can be guaranteed to provide 100 per cent resilience during natural disasters and power outages.

What are your communication options during an emergency?

In an emergency situation it is strongly recommended people do not rely on a single form of communication or source of information.

As any communication system can be temporarily affected by adverse conditions, a range of information sources and devices should be available and accessible to ensure people are aware of local conditions.

These sources include local radio, television, and state and territory emergency service websites or apps. For example, during emergency situations people can listen to ABC Local Radio to receive up-to-date warnings.

You should also consider downloading the Emergency+ app. This app uses GPS functionality built into smart phones to help a Triple Zero (000) caller provide critical location details required to mobilise emergency services.

Mobile phones may become lifelines during natural disasters, so it is important to conserve battery life and have a backup for charging these devices should there be a power outage.

However, it is also important to remember that during an emergency situation mobile reception may temporarily fail. A number of factors can interfere with reception and impact on a user's ability to obtain or maintain a mobile phone signal at any given time or place. For example, despite natural disaster planning, a mobile base station or phone tower may be damaged or destroyed in a bushfire, cyclone or flood situation.



A portable transistor radio with a spare set of batteries can provide a valuable backup in the event there is a loss of mains power or mobile coverage.

For people living, working and travelling in areas where there is poor or no mobile coverage alternative devices, such as low cost satellite personal location beacons (PLBs) and/or satellite phones, should be considered in case of an emergency. These devices are readily available from a number of recognised providers and can operate across the entire Australian landmass.

Emergency Alert

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 regarding likely or actual emergencies.

The alert operates across all mobile telephone networks. It sends SMS warnings to mobile phones based on the location of the handset at the time of an emergency, subject to the availability of terrestrial mobile coverage.

For more information about Emergency Alert, see: www.emergencyalert.gov.au.

Working together

Government and industry each have a role to play in providing and maintaining access to communications networks during emergency situations.

Role of industry

Mobile network operators proactively plan for networks and services to be as resilient as possible to all hazards, including those posed by natural events such as bushfires.

Generally, operators will maintain permanent generators at all critical infrastructure sites and battery power for secondary network elements as well as inventory of, or access to, backup generators to maintain networks and recharge batteries during extended power loss. In the event of an outage, most mobile phone towers have emergency access to power supplies of between four and eight hours depending on individual site arrangements.

Role of government

State and territory governments are responsible for emergency management within their own jurisdictions, including the resilience of power networks and provision of communications for emergency service organisations.

All Australian states and territories have established dedicated radiocommunications systems for use by emergency services.

The Australian Government provides support to the states and territories through the Radiocommunications Act 1992, including making sure adequate spectrum is available for agencies providing emergency services.

Commercial communications networks, including mobile phone networks, can at times provide supplementary communication to support emergency service operations.



The consumer grade services running on these networks should not be seen as a replacement or guaranteed fall-back arrangement for the dedicated radiocommunications systems provided by state and territory governments which are tailored to meet emergency service needs.

Mobile Black Spot Program

The Australian Government's \$380 million Mobile Black Spot Program is supporting better mobile coverage in regional and remote Australia. The program recently announced its fifth and sixth funding rounds.

Since the third round, all funded macro cell base stations have been required to provide at least 12 hours of battery backup power and at least three hours for small cells where feasible.

National Broadband Network

Australia's communications landscape is changing with the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) due for completion in 2020. In an emergency situation it is, however, unlikely NBN consumers will experience any significant differences between the pre-NBN environment and the new one. Internet connectivity and any communications services reliant on a local power supply will continue to be affected by power outages.

