



# Telecommunications Interdependencies

## Issue Background

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The Nation's ability to fulfill its national security missions depends on secure and reliable infrastructures. Interruptions or manipulations of vital services—telecommunications, energy, transportation, and banking and finance—would be detrimental to the welfare of the United States. The President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) recognizes that the interdependent relationship between the communications and other critical sectors requires a continual assessment of the vulnerabilities introduced by this symbiosis.

## History of NSTAC Actions

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The NSTAC first examined infrastructure interdependencies in 1986 when its Telecommunications Systems Survivability (TSS) Task Force initially reviewed the vulnerability of telecommunications to the loss of commercial electric power. Following the NSTAC's TSS recommendations and a Presidential request, the NSTAC formed the Energy Task Force to conduct a joint study with the electric power industry to examine the interdependencies between electric power and telecommunications after an earthquake. The NSTAC recommended the establishment of a program to assign priority electric power restoration to critical national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) telecommunications facilities. In 1995, the NSTAC Information Infrastructure Group conducted a series of risk assessments on the electric power, financial services, and transportation industries' dependence on information technology and the associated information assurance risks. Working with each respective industry, the NSTAC made recommendations to the President that emphasized the importance of industry and Government cooperation and information sharing.

## Recent NSTAC Activities

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After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the 2003 North American blackout, and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the interdependencies between the telecommunications and electric power sectors became increasingly apparent. The NSTAC formed the Telecommunications and Electric Power Interdependency Task Force (TEPITF) in Spring 2005 to investigate NS/EP communications issues associated with the interdependencies between these two sectors. The task force examined NS/EP concerns of multiple operational issues and how these interdependencies would affect the future of the telecommunications network. In January 2006, the NSTAC produced a report that addressed the Administration's concerns that telecommunications and electric power interdependencies may create additional vulnerabilities, particularly in emergency response situations. In December 2006, the NSTAC concluded its work and published a TEPITF report that defined and examined the "long-term outage" phenomenon.

In July 2007, the National Communications System (NCS) Committee of Principals (COP) formed the Communications Dependency Electric Power Working Group (CDEP WG) in response to recommendations in the NSTAC TEPITF report. The CDEP WG completed its study in 2009 by developing a final report and recommendations. In September 2009, the NCS Communications Government Coordinating Council elected to examine the top ten recommendations contained in the CDEP WG report to identify current actions underway to address CDEP WG recommendations and to promote the advancement of key recommendations.