Priority Communication Services

Getting calls through during an emergency or major disaster is essential for 911 call centers, police, fire, EMS, healthcare providers, critical infrastructure providers, and key leaders to carry out their duties. The Federal government has a few priority communication programs in place to help ensure that vital calls get through the network and that telecommunications services are restored or added on a priority basis. These programs should be an important aspect of any communications reliability strategy, especially for those who rely on telecommunications services to effectively respond to emergencies on a daily basis.

The Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) and the Wireless Priority Service (WPS) are priority calling programs offered to personnel performing National Security and Emergency Preparedness functions. A third program, Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP), addresses critical communications circuits and infrastructure. These programs are administered by the National Communications System (NCS), part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

GETS is a nationwide priority telecommunications service intended for use in a crisis, disaster, or other emergency when the probability of completing a phone call has significantly decreased. GETS subscribers receive a calling card that provides priority treatment in the Public Switched Network (PSN).

WPS is a priority feature activated on a specific cell phone. It gives authorized NS/EP personnel priority treatment for cellular calls. In addition, WPS is complementary to, and can be used in conjunction with GETS. This ensures a high probability of call completion in both the landline and cellular portions of the PSN.

TSP authorizes National Security and Emergency Preparedness organizations to receive priority treatment for restoration or provisioning of vital voice and data circuits or other telecommunications services. A TSP assignment ensures that these circuits will receive priority attention by the service vendor before any non-TSP service.

For more information, download the brochures for GETS, WPS, and TSP, by visiting the program web sites in the Priority Services section at http://ncs.gov/.

Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP)

On November 17, 1988, the Federal Communications Commission issued a Report and Order (FCC 88-341) establishing the TSP Program. The Report and Order established the TSP Program for national security/emergency preparedness organizations as an amendment to Part 64 of the Commission's Rules and Regulations (Title 47 CFR).

The goal is to ensure priority treatment for our nation's most important national security/emergency preparedness organizations telecommunications services. The program is the regulatory, administrative, and operational framework for the priority restoration and provisioning of any qualified NS/EP telecommunications. Services are those used to maintain a state of readiness or to respond to and manage any event or crisis (local, national, or international) that causes or could cause injury or harm to the population, damage to or loss of property, or degrades or threatens the national security/emergency preparedness organizations posture of the United States.

The TSP Program rules, as specified in the TSP Report and Order (FCC 88-341), authorize priority treatment to the following telecommunication services:

- Common carrier services which are interstate and foreign telecommunication services
- Common carrier services which are intrastate telecommunications services inseparable from interstate or foreign telecommunication services, and intrastate telecommunications services to which TSP priority levels are assigned
- Services which are provided by government and/or noncommon carriers and are interconnected to common carrier services assigned TSP priority levels.

In addition, priority treatment may be authorized at the discretion of, and upon special arrangements by the TSP Program users involved, to government or noncommon carrier services which are not connected to common carrier provided services, and portions of U.S. international services which are provided by foreign correspondents.

Restoration Priority

Restoration priority is for new or existing telecommunications and requires that service vendors restore them before non-TSP services. Restoration priority helps minimize service interruptions that may have a serious, adverse effect on the support function. Organizations must request TSP restoration priority before a service outage.

To request restoration priority:

1. Review participant responsibilities and certifythat the telecommunications service supports a function listed under one of five TSP categories. (http://tsp.ncs.gov/eligibility.html).
2. Register for TSP and receive an online account (http://tsp.ncs.gov/register.html).
3. Provide information (http://tsp.ncs.gov/request.html) about the services or circuits needing restoration. *(The TSP Program Office has up to 30 days to assign TSP Authorization Codes, but usually processes them within about two weeks.)*
4. Receive a TSP Authorization Code for each service or circuit for which you need priority.

5. Give the TSP Authorization Code to your service vendor.
6. The vendor confirms receipt of the TSP Authorization Code(s) with the TSP Program Office.
7. TSP Authorization Codes are active for three years, at which point the service user will need to revalidate them.

Additionally, the telephone service carrier must file a tariff locally to bill for the service. Organizations and telephone service carriers should reference the TSP materials on the FCC and NCS websites prior to direct assistance.

Healthcare facilities interested in enrolling in this program can call 866-627-2255 or via email tsp@hq.dhs.gov.

Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS)

GETS is a White House-directed emergency phone service provided by the National Communications System in the Office of Cybersecurity and Communications Division, National Protection and Programs Directorate, Department of Homeland Security. GETS supports Federal, State, local, and tribal government, industry, and non-governmental organization personnel in performing their National Security and Emergency Preparedness missions. GETS provides emergency access and priority processing in the local and long distance segments of the Public Switched Telephone Network. It is intended to be used in an emergency or crisis situation when the network is congested and the probability of completing a call over normal or other alternate telecommunication means has significantly decreased.

Although backup systems are in place, disruptions in service can still occur. Recent events have shown that natural disasters, power outages, fiber cable cuts, and software problems can cripple the telephone services of entire regions. However, during times of emergency or crisis, personnel with National Security and Emergency Preparedness missions need to know that their calls will go through. GETS addresses this need. Using enhancements based on existing commercial technology, GETS allows the National Security and Emergency Preparedness community to communicate over existing network paths with a high likelihood of call completion during the most severe conditions of high-traffic congestion and disruption. The result is a cost-effective, easy-to-use emergency telephone service that is accessed through a simple dialing plan and Personal Identification Number (PIN) card verification. It is maintained in a constant state of readiness as a means to overcome network outages through such methods as enhanced routing and priority treatment.

GETS is accessed through a universal access number using common telephone equipment such as a standard desk set, facsimile, modem, or wireless phone. A prompt will direct the entry of your PIN and the destination telephone number. Once you are authenticated as a valid user, your call is identified as an National Security and Emergency Preparedness call.

To register for GETS visit https://saic.custhelp.com/ci/documents/detail/2/gets_step1.
Scroll to the bottom of the page and enter the appropriate email address.