

FHH Telecom Law
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Duct Tape for the Network

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While the country debates whether plastic sheeting and duct tape will protect us against biological warfare, the communications industry is developing behind-the-scenes measures to secure the nation's communications infrastructure against terrorist attack.

The Network Reliability and Interoperability Council has long striven to develop means for sustaining public telecommunications networks in the event of terrorist attack or national disaster. Its work has taken on a greater sense of urgency in our current state of alert. Some of the 300 "best practices" being considered by the 56-member Council are already in use, including ways to increase physical security at communications facilities and to protect the confidentiality of proprietary information. The Council hopes those practices and others will be adopted and implemented across the industry.

The Council is looking at ways to secure both the physical network and the cyber network. Items under consideration for the physical network include the application of new technologies to better mitigate the effects of an attack, access control methods, personnel security procedures, network and facility design and construction methods to help secure critical infrastructure, management of critical inventory to hasten restoration of service, and physical inspection of equipment. Protecting the cyber network may entail securing cyber technologies and architecture as well as network information and operations support systems, securing access control methods, identifying, reporting, surviving, and responding to attacks, and protecting public communications networks against attacks from end-user networks.

The Council has not yet announced a date by which its "best practices" report will be complete and available to the industry.

The Council also supports a trial, set to run from January 1 to December 31 this year, during which cable, wireless, data, and ISP service providers offer voluntary outage reports. The trial is expected to provide valuable information to improve the reliability of these networks.