Text | Word 97

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 9, 1999

Contact: John Pasqua
Chairman, NRIC Steering Committee
908-542-6401; jpasqua@att.com

U.S. TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY VIRTUALLY COMPLETES YEAR 2000 READINESS

Washington, D.C. - November 9, 1999, - The U.S. Telecommunications Industry is virtually complete with its Year 2000 remediation and implementation programs and local and long distance services are expected to continue to function on and after January 1, 2000.

In its latest, public report to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Network Reliability and Interoperability Council (NRIC) IV announced that, based on input from telecommunications companies across the U.S., 100 percent of the switches, network elements and supporting software systems in the U.S. Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), owned by large, Local Exchange Carriers (LECs) and large, long distance Inter-Exchange Carriers (IXCs), have been made Y2K ready. While small- and mid-sized LECs trail their larger LEC counterparts in achieving Y2K readiness, the NRIC reported that most of these carriers should be compliant by the end of December 1999.

ASSESSMENT OF U.S. TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

The NRIC cited a recent FCC survey of 1,061 small- and mid-sized carriers, where 54 percent reported that they were Y2K ready at the end of June. The report went on to say that by the end of September, 92 percent of these carriers projected they would be Y2K ready and more than 98 percent expected to be Y2K ready by the end of December. Other surveys, independent of the FCC, conducted by the National Telephone Cooperative Association (NTCA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Rural Utility States (USDA/RUS) have also projected more than 98 percent Y2K readiness of these small- and mid-sized carriers by December 1999.

The NRIC also reported that call processing should not be affected by the century-date change based on extensive industry testing that has been accomplished. According to the NRIC report, no significant interoperability testing gaps were identified in Access and Inter-Exchange switches and signaling vendors. In addition, the NRIC report stated that interoperability testing by major LECs and IXCs had either been completed or was nearing completion and, in the process, no Y2K date-change related anomalies had been encountered. Additional interoperability testing between a major IXC and an Enhanced Service Provider, e.g., SS7 provider for small/mid-sized companies, is in progress.

The NRIC reported that the risk of failure of the domestic PSTN, due to Y2K, is minimal. The report did point out, however, that an estimated two million access lines, which equates to less than one percent of the U.S. total access lines, served by small and mid-sized carriers, could be at risk, resulting in some service quality degradation over time. The FCC is developing a plan to assist these companies achieve Y2K readiness.

ASSESSMENT OF NETWORK RELIABILITY

The NRIC, with input from the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions' (ATIS) Network Reliability Steering Committee (NRSC), reported that there were 47 outage incidents in the past quarter across the telecommunications network. The report stated most failure categories were within

control limits but that outage exceptions were found in power, digital cross connect systems and those for which the root cause was procedural errors. The NRIC report pointed out that the industry is addressing these exceptions through recently published NRSC Procedural Errors recommendations (www.atis.org) and through "Power" best practices from NRIC's Focus Group 3's Best Practices subcommittee. This subcommittee is also reviewing, modifying and supplementing the entire inventory of Best Practices to make them broadly applicable to all segments of the telecommunications and information industry.

In addition, the NRIC's Data Analysis and Future Considerations subcommittee developed guidelines and templates designed to remove ambiguities and improve the quality of telecommunications outage reporting. The NRIC also recommended a voluntary trial of at least one year, coordinated and conducted by the National Coordinating Center for Telecommunications of the National Communications System (NCC/NCS), to develop guidelines for the reporting of outages or incidents affecting telecommunications and information services that are currently not required to report outages.

ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS

Based on input from various public and private assessments over the past quarter, the NRIC reported the risk profile of international traffic to and from the United States on and after January 1, 2000 has continued to improve. With 90 percent of U.S. international traffic or a total of 29B Minutes of International Telecom Traffic (MITT), to and from 53 countries, only 16 percent of that traffic remains at high risk of some problems on or after January 1, 2000. Since NRIC's July report, 21 percent of this international traffic has moved from high and medium risk to the low risk category resulting in a current total of 72 percent of this international calling being reported as low risk. The remaining 10 percent of the U.S. international traffic or 3B MITT is to and from 171 other countries. Seventy percent of the traffic, however, is still in high risk.

The NRIC reported that additional testing had been completed under the auspices of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and ATIS, focused on major international gateway switch vendor equipment and North American service providers. No Y2K anomalies were found.

The risk of international call failure between North America and other world regions was also reported as being minimal. Potential impacts, however, of Y2K to international calling include:

- Call set-up delay due to network congestion in some foreign networks;
- Degradation of service quality over time due to non-compliant components of some foreign networks.

The NRIC also reported that unpredictable infrastructure failures in other utility industries worldwide had the potential to adversely impact telecommunications networks both domestically and around the world.

ASSESSMENT OF NETWORK ACCESS

The NRIC report also provided insight on the readiness of customer premises equipment (CPE) and systems that interface with the Public Switched Telecommunications Network (PSTN). The NRIC reported that that are no major problems or industry-wide issues that cannot be handled with planning, including emergency 911 call processing. The NRIC recommended that CPE suppliers and service providers share the following information with customers, suppliers and distributors:

- Communicate current Y2K status of products;
- Communicate availability of Y2K upgrades;

- Make Y2K solutions available when needed;
- Share testing strategy/results;
- Share contingency plans with both customers and supply chain;
- Encourage distributors to reach end users;
- Share Y2K impact on non-compliant, legacy equipment.

The NRIC report went on to point out that end users must:

- Become informed about the CPE being used;
- Inventory all systems;
- Contact vendors to establish compliance status;
- Plan/budget for needed upgrades;
- Follow supplier recommendations;
- Develop a contingency plan;
- Validate that your major vendors have such a plan;
- Have emergency phone numbers ready in the event of a CPE problem.

The NRIC also reported continuing improvement in the Y2K readiness of Public Safety Answering Positions (PSAPs), which are utilized by local governments in responding to 911 calls.

In a survey, conducted by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) for the NRIC, it was determined that there is a total population of 4,300 PSAPs nationwide. The survey also determined that 99.7 percent of the 2,754 PSAPs, that responded to the NENA survey, would be Y2K ready by January 1, 2000. NENA will attempt to complete its vendor survey with non-respondents during the fourth quarter in an ongoing notification campaign with PSAP vendors on the need for Y2K readiness.

ASSESSMENT OF INDUSTRY-WIDE CONTINGENCY PLANNING

In its report, the NRIC also reviewed contingency planning efforts across the telecommunications industry. The NCC/NCS will act as the focal point for data collection (both from domestic and foreign sources) and notification, using the NCC's Y2K database. Participants in this contingency planning initiative include major LECs, IXCs, Industry Forums, ITU members and government agencies. When available, the NCC will share information with the FCC and the Information Coordination Center (ICC). At present, small and medium sized carriers do not have a viable approach for participation in this contingency planning program and the U.S. Telecommunications Association (USTA) is exploring the possibility of posting information on its web site for these carriers.

In conclusion, the NRIC reported that the U.S. telecommunications industry has taken and continues to take appropriate actions to achieve Y2K readiness in advance of the century-change date and that the public switched telephone network will continue to reliably function, interoperate and interconnect on and after January 1, 2000. Information regarding individual NRIC Focus Group presentations will be posted on the NRIC web site (http://www.nric.org). Information regarding other NRIC activities associated with general network reliability can be found at http://www.atis.org/atis/nrsc/nrscinfo.htm.

###