

We hope the CPUC was listening

The California Public Utilities Commission was in Ukiah recently and got an earful from local residents and emergency responders about the woeful state of modern communications in our rural area.

In Our Opinion

While the CPUC was here to talk about the quality of phone service in rural areas, they acknowledged that what they were hearing most about was the problem of loss of all communications – including 911 service – during telecom outages.

This area has seen digital services go out and we know what it's like when so many people are completely stranded without phones and no way of finding out if there is an emergency. There are also many people who don't have cell service and who still depend on landlines for communications, lines that AT& T would love to completely abandon.

The lack of broadband service in our area is most important when an emergency happens. Sheriff Allman told the CPUC that one cellular service outage had been ongoing for six hours before emergency services were alerted. He said that AT& T is secretive about outages and how and when they are being repaired. Other emergency workers, like local firefighters and medical workers said having 911 down for prolonged periods is a real crisis that leaves the community scrambling.

Our feeling is that AT& T does not take these outages nearly seriously enough. It also does not appear to be making a concerted effort to provide redundant services to our area – meaning extra lines and equipment that can be put into use when one main artery goes down or is vandalized.

We hope that the CPUC will enforce the responsibility of communication carriers to provide reliable, consistent state-of-the-art service to rural areas. These carriers know what they should be doing.

The CPUC needs to simply make them do it.