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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

New Numbers: The Long Battle Ahead with Infrastructure Attacks

The telecom industry's effort to drive awareness of attacks on communications networks continued Tuesday. **AT&T** hosted the third edition of the "Telecom Industry Summit: Protecting Critical Communications Infrastructure" at its El Segundo office, where folks got to see updated numbers illustrating the magnitude of such incidents, in addition to the economic ramifications they have on companies and consumers.

Forty-two companies and organizations participated in the event, including **CTIA**, **ACA Connects**, **WIA**, the **FBI** and the **Department of Homeland Security**, with around 150 leaders attending either in person or virtually. The first Summit was held [nearly a year ago](#), kick-starting what's become [a growing push](#) to drive awareness across Congress, law enforcement and the industry itself. However, despite the advocacy, the issue of broadband theft and vandalism isn't showing signs of going away soon.

The latest data from **NCTA's** "Protecting the Nation's Critical Communications Infrastructure from Theft & Vandalism" report shows the number of incidents has gone up. From June 2024-December 2024, NCTA noted 5,770 reported incidents of intentional theft and/or vandalism, or an average of 824 per month or 27 per day in the U.S. The latest study revealed that incidents nearly doubled to 9,770 in the following six-month period. When looking at a year-long period from June 2024-June 2025, 15,540 incidents occurred nationwide for an average of 1,295 incidents per month and 43 per day, impact-

ing more than 9.5 million customers along the way—which NCTA's Senior Director, State and External Affairs *Kuper Jones* admitted "is a very, very conservative number. We estimate it to be higher than that."

Ten states accounted for 80% of the incidents, with California and Texas alone making up 53%—6,003 and 2,270 incidents, respectively. While copper is still the primary target for vandals, NCTA notes that fiber-optic networks and wireless towers are becoming collateral damage more frequently.

"I think we all know what the driving factor here is, right? It's thieves seeking out copper," Jones said. "The gaps in scrap metal regulation in general, we believe that is a significant driving factor here... This is not a fiber labeling problem. The lines are pretty well labeled. I believe even some folks go as far as putting signs on the lines that say, 'Not copper,' and somehow that does not deter thieves from severing lines."

One of the actions Jones sees as mitigating infrastructure attacks is improving regulations pertaining to scrap metal sales. He suggests requiring a driver's license when purchasing scrap metal in addition to prohibiting the purchase of burnt copper or telecom wire.

To further drive the scope of these attacks, *Dr. Edward Lopez*, an economics professor at Western Carolina University, presented an [economic analysis](#) to highlight "The Real Costs of Communications Outages due to Infrastructure Theft or Vandalism." Using the willingness-to-pay economic method, Lopez's estimates that the full societal costs of service disruption

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between June and December of 2024 fall between \$38 million and \$188 million cumulatively, which is significantly higher than the replacement cost of stolen copper or damaged equipment. For consumers specifically, the real costs—a household's willingness to pay on a daily basis multiplied by the number of locations whose service was interrupted—were \$93.75 million in the U.S. (using a 500 Mbps/25 Mbps benchmark).

Jones wasn't the only one yearning for lawmakers to pay more attention to the issue. **FCC** Commissioner *Olivia Trusty* joined virtually to deliver a keynote address, telling attendees that the government can't solve this alone and that the industry bears responsibilities as well. Trusty encouraged folks to invest in better physical security for fiber lines, substations and towers. She also said providers are accountable for sharing information with others expeditiously, in addition to collaborating with law enforcement.

On the other end, Trusty said authorities across all levels need to adjust their approach to broadband vandalism. "That means stronger coordination between FBI field offices, state attorneys general and local police departments. It means prioritizing these crimes in the same way we prioritize attacks on the power grid or water systems, and it means educating judges and juries that these are not just cable outages, they are threats to life and safety," she said.

Trusty hopes to see Congress enact federal law to make intentional attacks on private networks explicitly criminalized. On the state level, California Attorney General *Rob Bonta* believes his team's experiences working on other issues like organized retail crime could be applied to combating attacks on telecommunications infrastructure.

"I've always believed that there's rarely a brand new solution to a problem; there's just solutions that haven't been used here yet. Someone else is using it to be applied successfully somewhere else, and maybe we can use that here without reinventing the wheel," Bonta said. "There's no panacea, no one thing that will solve this entire problem. It'll probably be a culmination and a summation of numerous actions."

The culmination may include some of the actions already underway in some states. Thirteen states passed laws to strengthen communications infrastructure protection in 2025, with Texas, Kentucky, Minnesota and Indiana recently bolstering their felony classifications for theft and vandalism. Currently, 28 states deem telecom incidents as a felony.

At the federal level, the Stopping the Theft and Destruction of Broadband Act of 2025 was introduced in April, seeking to criminalize attacks on privately owned communications networks.

"This is not about partisan politics. This is about public safety, economic and national security and basic reliability," Trusty said, later noting the public's responsibility to help with

advocacy. "If more Americans understood that ripping out cable can cut off their own access to 911, disrupt their own children's online classes or prevent firefighters from receiving dispatches, they might see these crimes in a different light."

FCC TEES UP NEXTGEN TV

It ain't just [Space Month](#) at the **FCC**. October's open meeting will include votes on a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that seeks comments on next steps to support the ongoing, voluntary transition to NextGen TV. Remember this is a notice, not a rule, but if adopted, it would tentatively conclude that television stations should be allowed to choose when to stop broadcasting in 1.0 and start broadcasting exclusively in 3.0. The notice would seek comment on issues around ATSC 3.0, such as a requirement that traditional pay TV providers carry 3.0 signals to their subscribers. The FCC also wants feedback on the sunset of 1.0 and the use of encryption or digital rights management on broadcast signals. **NAB** has proposed sunsetting ATSC 1.0 in 2028 and 2030, with a mandate for ATSC 3.0 tuners. But the **Consumer Technology Association**, **NCTA**, **ACA Connects**, **American Television Alliance** and **LPTV Broadcasters Association** have expressed opposition. Among NCTA's concerns is that its cable operator members would have to make costly changes to their networks to offer 3.0 signals. CTA strongly objects to NAB's pitch to require that TVs include ATSC 3.0 tuners in them by February 2028.

FCC LOOKS TO STREAMLINE BROADBAND LABELS

Also on the **FCC's** October agenda is a vote on a proposed rule-making that would nix some of the broadband label requirements, such as having to read the label over the phone to consumers and itemizing state and local passthrough fees that vary depending on location. It's also seeking input on further streamlining and eliminating other label requirements that are "unduly burdensome and provide minimal benefit to consumers." Expect cable operators to have a lot of suggestions for pairing the labels down. Congress passed a law in 2021 that had the FCC adopt rules requiring ISPs to display consumer friendly info on prices, speeds and more at the point of sale online and in stores. Broadband providers had to comply with the rules in April 2024 (those serving fewer than 100,000 customers had until Oct. 10, 2024). The FCC is proposing to eliminate rules requiring the labels to be displayed in customer account portals as well as requiring that they be archived for at least two years after a service is no longer offered. It's also seeking comment on other issues, including whether to eliminate the multilingual display requirement.

While the labels themselves are statutorily mandated, the FCC has discretion over the rules around their display. Streamlining broadband labels was high on the wish list of many that filed comments in the FCC's Delete, Delete, Delete proceeding. **ACA Connects** said members report that maintenance and upkeep of the labels is a substantial monthly expense.

CALIF. TAKES AIM AT LOUD ADS

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) signed a bill into law this week that expands the CALM Act to streaming services. Passed by Congress in 2010, CALM requires broadcast stations and pay TV providers to ensure that commercials aren't louder than the primary content being watched. "We heard Californians loud and clear, and what's clear is that they don't want commercials at a volume any louder than the level at which they were previously enjoying a program," Newsom said. The new law takes effect in California on July 1. On the national front, one of the first dockets *Brendan Carr* opened at the **FCC** after taking the chairmanship was on whether updates are needed to protect consumers from loud commercials. The **Streaming Video Alliance**, whose members include **Netflix**, **HBO Max**, **Disney** and **Paramount+**, told the FCC that the agency does not have authority to regulate volume matters on video streaming platforms. The streamers argued that imposing a volume standard could be unsustainably costly for many streaming providers, particularly given unique technical aspects. Unlike broadcasters, many commercials on online platforms are dynamically inserted by third-party ad networks, so streamers don't have direct control over the loudness level. The FCC hasn't taken any action on the docket thus far.

CABLE HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2026 INCLUDES A FAMILIAR NAME

The **Syndeo Institute at the Cable Center** has announced the Cable Hall of Fame Class of 2026. Among this year's honorees are **Adaptive Spirit Organization and Event**, **NCTC** CEO *Lou Borrelli*, **AMC Networks** CEO *Kristin Dolan*, **HBCU GO TV** President *Curtis Symonds*, and *Dave Fellows*, former **Comcast** CTO and past Chair of the **Cable TV Pioneers**. **CFX** readers will also recognize a very familiar name on the list of inductees: our own Editorial Director, *Amy Maclean*, honored for her more than 20 years of authoritative reporting on the cable and broadband business and the impact she has made in the industry, including at this publication. Please join us in congratulating Amy and all of the Class of 2026! Inductees will be honored at a red-carpet event in NYC on April 23.

COMCAST FREEWHEEL, ROKU EXPAND PARTNERSHIP

Roku and **FreeWheel**, **Comcast's** ad tech platform, announced an expansion of their partnership. Roku's premium CTV supply

is now available through the FreeWheel Streaming Hub with better demand signals, more transparency and more efficient monetization. The expanded partnership also creates greater scale for buyers to transact more efficiently with Roku inventory. Meanwhile, publishers can now connect directly to Roku's supply in the FreeWheel Marketplace via a standardized real-time bidding-based connection.

ALL WEST REBRAND

All West Communications is now **All West Fiber**. "This change marks an important milestone in our journey and reflects who we've become as a company," the ISP said in its announcement. The rebrand also comes with a new logo emphasizing mountain peaks, which "represent progress, innovation and resilience." The provider, which serves communities in Utah and Wyoming, plans to roll out the new branding across its website, social handles, vehicles, uniforms and customer communications over the next few months.

THE BUNDLE HITS THE ROAD

GM is making **Disney+** available in select vehicles, joining its suite of streaming options that include **Hulu**, **Tubi**, **YouTube** and **YouTube Kids**. Customers with an active Disney+ subscription and eligible OnStar plan can log in and stream in 2025 and newer models of the Chevrolet Tahoe and Suburban; GMC Yukon and Yukon XL; and Cadillac Escalade, Escalade IQ, Escalade IQL and Celestiq.

FIBER FRENZY

Tennessee broadband provider **United Communications** will acquire rural ISP **Loretto Telecom**. This will add more than 8,000 locations in Lawrence County to United's footprint in Middle Tennessee. The deal is expected to be closed by EOY, subject to regulatory approvals. Loretto customers will not experience any operational changes or service interruptions due to the transaction. – Sparklight has completed its fiber expansion project in downtown Denison, Texas, bringing 5 Gig symmetrical speeds to businesses and 1 Gig speeds to residents in the area.

PROGRAMMING

The Columbus Blue Jackets and Minnesota Wild extended their media rights agreements with **Main Street Sports Group**. The deal means that fans will continue to have access to in-market broadcasts through **FanDuel Sports Network** across cable, satellite and vMVPD packages as well as its DTC streaming platform. The RSN has kept busy. Last week, it inked a deal with the Clippers to handle streaming duties for the NBA team. – The incredibly popular superhero anime "One-Punch Man" will return for its third season on Oct. 12, streaming on **Hulu**.