



# GETS/WPS® NewsNotes

## Amidst COVID-19, Strong Upswings in Priority Services Activations and Usage

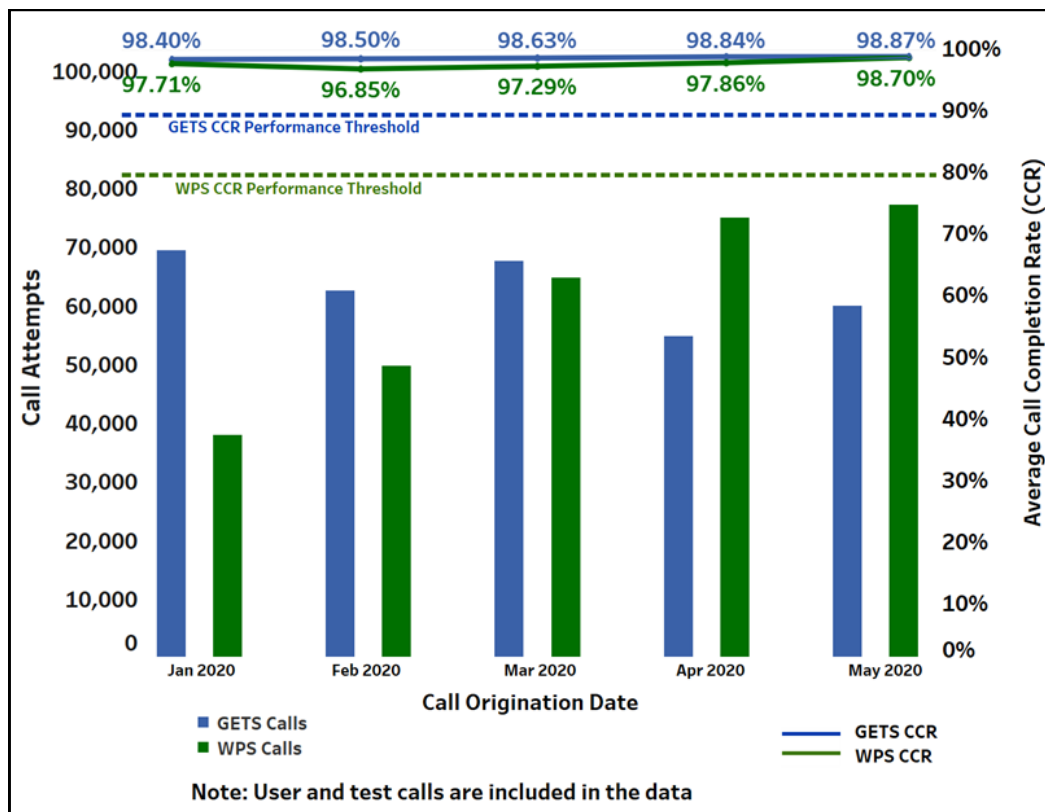
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused large-scale changes to everyday work and home life. Telecommunications usage has shifted from urban areas and office buildings to residential areas as people stay at home and telework, use telehealth services, and conduct distance learning. Industry reports that during the highest peak of COVID-related network usage, customers were placing double the normal amount of wireless voice calls, with a 33% increase in duration for those calls; daily texting equaled New Year’s Eve levels; Wi-Fi calling minutes were up 100%; home connections to company virtual private networks were up almost 50%; and Web browsing was up 20%.

During the early days of the pandemic, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency/

Emergency Communications Division (CISA/ECD) launched a priority services initiative to refresh user base awareness at multiple levels of government and industry, and to maximize the availability of priority tools and their utilization. At the same time, the Priority Telecommunications Service (PTS) Program Office saw large increases in GETS and WPS subscription requests, with many from public health organizations. At its peak, the Program Office was handling 13 times the normal issuing of GETS cards, and 32 times the normal WPS volume of cellphone activations. Throughout March, the Program Office mailed out roughly 45 FedEx packages daily to ensure that users received GETS cards in a reasonable time frame; the highest daily count was 119 packages. Additionally, GETS and WPS saw heavier-than-normal usage, with sustained high levels of GETS and WPS call attempts during January through May (see the chart above). Successful call completions for GETS and WPS during these months stayed well above the required government performance thresholds, despite the high communications network loading brought about by operating under the “stay at home” guidance.

The Program Office expedited over 380 pandemic-related requests for Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP). Essential circuits were installed for emergency field hospitals and healthcare provider organization facilities, the production of personal protective equipment (PPE), and testing labs supporting vaccine creation. TSP also extended essential communications support to the USNS Mercy and USNS Comfort, which were dispatched to assist in COVID-19 relief efforts in Los Angeles and New York City. The Mercy arrived in Los Angeles on Friday, March 27, and the Comfort arrived in New York on Monday, March 30.

As the pandemic persists, CISA/ECD will continue to manage and provide priority services to meet the critical communications needs of National Security/Emergency Preparedness users at all levels of government, emergency responders, vital industry, and critical infrastructure owners and operators.

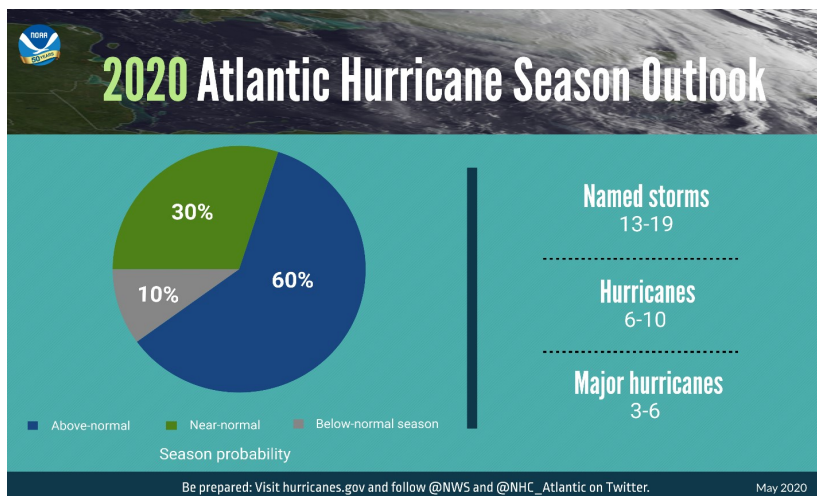


GETS and WPS Call Attempts

## Forecast Calls for Above-Average Atlantic Hurricane Season

According to its official hurricane forecast released on May 21, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is calling for an above-average Atlantic hurricane season, with 13 to 19 named storms. Of those storms, NOAA predicts 6 to 10 hurricanes, 3 to 6 of which could develop into major hurricanes (Category 3 or above). The Atlantic hurricane season lasts until November 30.

This year, the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic may complicate rescue and recovery efforts. To prepare, all GETS/WPS® subscribers are reminded to make test calls on a regular basis and to update their phones to the latest version of the PTS Dialer, available through the Apple App Store and Google Play. The app is free to download.



Source: <https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/busy-atlantic-hurricane-season-predicted-for-2020>

## May 2020 User Council Webinar

On May 21, 2020, a GETS/WPS® User Council Webinar was held with 968 GETS/WPS® Points of Contact (POCs) and other priority services stakeholders participating. The discussions focused on providing updates on priority services and their operation and were conducted entirely online, due to restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the start of the webinar, CISA/ECD staff noted that the priority services' support and performance in response to COVID-19 has been a highly collaborative, nationwide effort. Of note, GETS and WPS maintained very high call completion rates despite increased network loading. As of May 15, 2020, WPS subscriptions (at 416,957) had overtaken GETS subscriptions (at 416,115) for the first time, due to extremely high numbers of expedited WPS subscriptions during the pandemic. A speaker from AT&T presented an overview of their business continuity planning, detailing how they can provide network resilience on short notice following major emergencies. A Priority Services Area Representative (PAR) detailed PAR COVID-19 activities, reviewed common questions from PAR engagements, and reminded participants that personnel in emergency planning, response, or recovery qualify for priority services. CISA staff also reviewed the TSP Program, reporting the provisioning of services to organizations involved in the COVID-19 response.

The Program Office also recommended use of the PTS Dialer, a smartphone app that simplifies GETS/WPS® dialing and reduces errors, which has been recently updated. WPS subscribers will now receive a text message when WPS service has been activated on their phone (please see the article on page 3 for additional information).

A well-received part of the webinar was a demonstration of

the PTS Dialer, which reviewed some recent updates to the app and provided a helpful tutorial on how to use it. Improvements in the app include easier one-hand operation, a Frequent Calls list, and a streamlined approach to placing test calls. The tutorial is available at <https://gets-wps.csgov.com/Library/Download.ashx?id=54848> via the GETS/WPS Information Distribution System (GWIDS) portal at <https://gets-wps.csgov.com/Login.aspx>.



### PTS Dialer

The webinar discussion also covered some notable developments in the telecom marketplace and regulatory environment. Regarding the April 1, 2020 T-Mobile and Sprint merger, WPS operations will remain unchanged in the near term, e.g., users will stay with the same Sprint and T-Mobile network, stores, and service they've been using. However, GETS calls originated on T-Mobile phones will now be routed to Sprint for authentication, operator services and priority to 800 destinations. Also, regarding a recent Federal Communications Commission mandate to industry for Caller ID authentication, the GETS/WPS® Program Office will be working with service providers to ensure that any related network changes not impact GETS/WPS® functionality.

The complete, edited video of the May 2020 User Council Webinar is available online at <https://gets-wps.csgov.com/Library/Download.ashx?id=54845>, with the slides at <https://gets-wps.csgov.com/Library/Download.ashx?id=54844>.

## New Capability: WPS Activation Text Messages Notify New WPS Users

Short message service (SMS) text messages (texts) are now being sent to new WPS subscribers notifying them that WPS has been activated on their phone (see Figure 1). The message content includes a link (<https://gets-wps.csgov.com/External/WPSWelcome/>) to a web page with details about the WPS program, in addition to links to download the PTS Dialer onto their phone (see Figure 2). Please note that the landing page is an official government website despite the “.com” top-level domain ending. Google Chrome, Firefox, or Microsoft Edge are the preferred browsers.

As a good cybersecurity practice, users should always read the entire message (including the link) *before* clicking on it. This is to make sure that they are not receiving a “spoof” message from a malicious actor that would direct them to a harmful website or download malware on to their device.

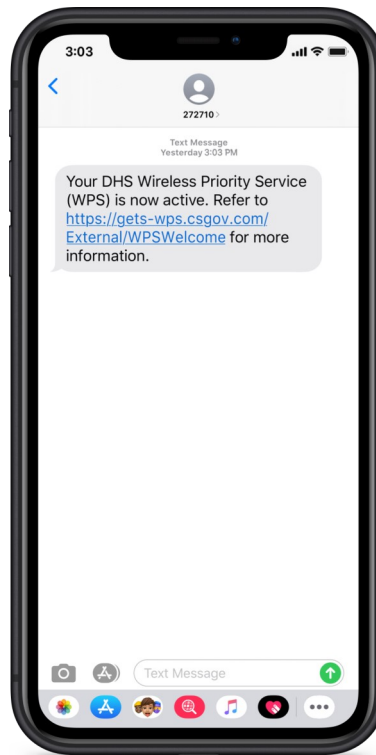


Figure 1: A screenshot of the activation text message shown on an iOS device



Figure 2: A screenshot of the activation landing page that presents on an iOS device

## Revalidation of GETS/WPS® Accounts

Annual revalidation of subscribers plays a crucial role in keeping the GETS and WPS programs up to date. POCs are asked to verify that users in their organizations are present and still qualify for the services. One month before the revalidation due date, POCs can expect e-mail reminders to revalidate their users by logging on to GWIDS and making any necessary changes, including additions, modifications, and deletions. POCs submit their revalidation through GWIDS.

If POCs have any questions about revalidation, they are encouraged to contact the Service Center at 866-627-2255, and the staff will be happy to help.

## WPS is Available to FirstNet Users

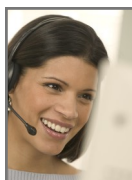
FirstNet provides always-on priority and pre-emption on voice and data services via First Priority®. WPS when combined with First Priority® extends voice priority beyond the FirstNet network all the way to the destination number.

As a reminder, having FirstNet on a phone does not automatically enroll the phone with WPS. To subscribe to WPS, FirstNet users need to submit a WPS service request in GWIDS and select the carrier option “AT&T or FirstNet” in the dropdown menu that appears. For any questions on enrolling FirstNet phones for WPS, please contact the Service Center at 866-627-2255.

## Reminder: Please Report Problems to 24-Hour User Assistance

Subscribers are reminded to contact 24 Hour User Assistance at 800-818-4387 for GETS or WPS troubleshooting. If you have a GETS card, please have your GETS PIN (card number) available when you make the call so staff can assist you more quickly.

To ensure calls receive priority outside of the FirstNet network, NS/EP users must dial the \*272 Feature Code before their destination number. The Feature Code is automatically entered for users placing WPS calls using the PTS Dialer. Please note that there are no usage, monthly, or set-up fees for WPS.



DHS Priority Telecommunications Service Center /  
24 Hour User Assistance

800-818-4387 | 703-818-4387

866-627-2255 | 703-676-2255

[support@priority-info.com](mailto:support@priority-info.com)