

TMA Member Statement

From TMA's Technology Committee and Alarm Industry Communications Committee

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AT&T Copper Network Discontinuance and the Transition Away from Legacy POTS: What Alarm Providers and Monitoring Centers Need to Know

Overview

AT&T has begun retiring its legacy copper (TDM) telephone network, with the first major wave of service discontinuance effective on or after June 30, 2026, affecting customers in defined wire centers across 17 states. Separately, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted a new framework that streamlines copper retirement going forward. Together, these developments mean that traditional copper phone lines – the transport path many alarm systems still depend on – are being withdrawn on a rolling basis, and the pace will increase as AT&T works toward exiting most of its copper network by the end of 2029.

TMA's Alarm Industry Communications Committee (AICC) participated directly in the FCC proceeding, advocating for the reliability of alarm signaling and the protection of life-safety communications during this transition. The Commission acknowledged these concerns on the record and cited them among its reasons for declining to deregulate the discontinuance process more broadly. AICC continues to press alarm-signaling and 911-reliability issues in the related FCC proceedings now underway. This statement summarizes where matters stand and what members should do now to protect their accounts.

Carrier Obligations

A carrier's regulatory obligation in a copper discontinuance runs to providing affected customers with replacement voice service and access to 911 – not to preserving the technical characteristics that alarm signaling depends on. AT&T qualified the June 30 wave by offering its IP-based replacement service,

AT&T Phone-Advanced (and its business equivalent), as an adequate replacement, with connectivity provided primarily over AT&T's wireless (LTE) network.

AT&T represents that its replacement service supports alarms, fax, medical monitoring, and 911, and claims interoperability with legacy devices. Members should understand this as the carrier's own representation, not as an independent guarantee or an FCC requirement. The FCC declined to require that replacement services support end-to-end alarm-signaling compatibility, opting instead to encourage carriers to configure their networks to avoid alarm-signaling failures. The result: whether a given alarm account continues to communicate reliably after migration is not something the rules assure – it is something providers must verify.

Customer Notification

AT&T provides written notice to the billing customer of record for the affected line, identifying the service address and the effective date. For the June 30, 2026 wave, residential customers reportedly received notice approximately twelve months in advance. The formal window to object to a discontinuance with the FCC, however, is much shorter – generally 15 days after the Commission publishes notice of the application.

This notification structure creates a real gap for our industry. The alarm provider or monitoring center is usually not the customer of record for the subscriber's phone line and therefore does not receive the notice. Compounding this, because the carrier's notice tells subscribers that "alarms" are supported, a subscriber may feel reassured and never contact their alarm provider at all. Members should not assume they will be told when an account is affected and should not assume a notified subscriber will raise it.

Going forward, the FCC's new framework reduces notice further: it eliminates the requirement that carriers file copper-retirement disclosures with the Commission, directs formal notice to interconnecting carriers and 911 entities rather than to alarm providers or end users, and allows carriers to "grandfather" legacy services – stopping new orders and changes – with no FCC application. For many accounts, the first visible sign may be a grandfathering notice well before any discontinuance date.

Service Continuity

When a wire center is retired, the affected copper lines stop on the effective date. There is no mandatory call forwarding or required grace period beyond that date. For alarm communications, three points are essential:

A replacement voice service that restores dial tone may not reliably carry or supervise alarm signaling. Restoring “phone service” is not evidence of a working signal path. Compatibility must be confirmed per panel and per signaling format.

The replacement path is power-dependent in a way copper was not. Legacy copper service was powered from the central office; the replacement device relies on local power with a limited backup battery, and that battery does not power connected alarm or medical-monitoring equipment. Members should confirm that each panel and communicator has adequate backup power independent of the carrier’s device.

Path supervision matters more than ever. A properly supervised and monitored communication path will report a failure to the monitoring center. Members should confirm supervision intervals against the applicable edition of NFPA 72 and the requirements of the relevant authorities.

Potential Risks for Alarm Providers and Monitoring Centers

Following are a few potential risks that may arise because of the discontinuance of copper services.

- A fire or burglar alarm signal fails to reach the monitoring center because the underlying transport changed and was not verified.
- Reliance on the carrier’s “supports alarms” representation without testing the actual signal path and format.
- Liability exposure where a signal fails because a line was discontinued or migrated without the provider’s knowledge, particularly where reasonable steps to identify and test at-risk accounts were available.
- Code and Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) compliance gaps from discontinued or unsupervised paths under NFPA 72 and local fire code.
- The short objection window if a member wishes to raise concerns with the FCC about a specific discontinuance.

A note on state protections: members should be cautious about relying on state carrier-of-last-resort rules as a backstop. The FCC has signaled in recent proceedings that state requirements effectively forcing carriers to keep providing legacy service after federal discontinuance authorization may be preempted. State consumer-protection, universal-service, and 911 authority are not affected, but the availability of a state-law safety net is now uncertain and varies by state.

Legal Considerations (Issues to Review with Your Own Counsel)

The potential risks outlined above raise legal questions that turn on each member's contracts, jurisdiction, and circumstances. TMA is not in a position to give legal advice, and the items below are not answers; they are issues members should put to their own counsel.

- *Monitoring-agreement terms governing communication-path failure.*
- *Standard of care and proactive duty.*
- *Enforceability of limitation-of-liability and waiver provisions.*
- *Business-customer contract override language.*
- *False alarm and other regulatory obligations.*
- *Notification and documentation practices.*

Again, these are categories for review, not a complete list, and they are not legal advice. Members should consult their own counsel on how each applies to their agreements and jurisdiction.

What's Next

Copper retirement is a multi-year, rolling process, not a single event. Additional discontinuance waves will follow under the FCC's faster framework. AICC remains engaged before the Commission on alarm-signaling reliability and 911 continuity, including in the ongoing IP interconnection and related proceedings, and TMA will keep members informed as the transition develops.

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About The Monitoring Association

The Monitoring Association (TMA) is the nonprofit trade association representing the professional monitoring and response industry. Our membership community includes companies spanning all industry sectors, including monitoring centers, video monitoring companies, systems integrators, service providers, installers, consultants, and product manufacturers. Learn more at <https://tma.us/about-tma/>.