

[Officials rethink emergency communications after ice storm](#)

Ability to communicate through telephone and over internet went down with power lines in many areas

[CBC News](#) Posted: Jan 09, 2014 7:27 AM AT Last Updated: Jan 09, 2014 7:27 AM AT

Emergency response officials in southern New Brunswick are re-thinking how they manage communication with the public after the recent ice storm.

Several communities in southern New Brunswick subscribe to Sentinel Systems to get the word out in times of emergency.

But when an ice storm before Christmas knocked out power to tens of thousands of NB Power customers, the ability to contact many people through telephone and internet communication went down with the electrical and telephone lines.

Freezing rain led to power lines and those of other utilities being taken down in the ice storm. (Paul Palmetier/CBC)

Grand Bay-Westfield Fire Chief Troy Gautreay says Sentinel Systems public warning software is the best way to spread word of an emergency.

But Gautreau says he didn't expect cell phones, internet and landlines to be knocked out by the ice storm.

"We did have to do some door-to-door, posted some signs in the community," Gautreau said.



Grand Bay-Westfield shares the Sentinel Systems program with nearby communities. People are urged to sign up for alerts that are sent to computers and telephones.

Denis DesRosiers, the president of Bathurst-based Sentinel Systems, says their programs worked as planned during the ice storm.

"But of course we don't have control over the [telephone company] infrastructure or the power grid, so it does assume there is a device that can listen on the other end," said DesRosiers.

With the switch to fibre-optic networks, once backup batteries die, so do phones. DesRosiers says it's a new reality.

"I think it's an important point people need to be aware of, or ask their phone providers to make sure they can place a 911 call when they need it," said DesRosiers.

Even in emergency situations, a total communications blackout is rare, said DesRosiers.