



Opinions : Wireless signal can save lives

January 23, 2008

Dear Editor:

I am writing to alert you to a critical public safety issue affecting residents of Wisconsin - the lack of high-quality wireless coverage in rural areas. As our community gears up for months of severe, unpredictable and oftentimes dangerous winter weather, it is critical that we are able to count on a strong, reliable wireless signal as it is often a primary means of communication during emergency situations.

As a law enforcement official in Wisconsin, I can testify that the lack of high-quality wireless coverage in rural areas is a critical public safety concern in Wisconsin and in states around the country. First responders, firefighters and police officers all depend on reliable coverage to handle emergency situations ranging from natural disasters, car accidents to reports of domestic violence.

In many cases, reliable wireless service can literally mean the difference between life and death, especially at this time of year when severe weather can cause hazardous road conditions and widespread power outages.

Despite this, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently signaled its intent to cap the Universal Service Fund (USF) "very soon" and could do so any day. Wisconsin's rural wireless carriers estimate that a cap would cost the state about \$7 million per year, jeopardizing the construction of dozens of new sites. This would compromise public safety resources and further put us at a disadvantage during winter storms.

To this end, I support Connecting Rural America, an effort aimed to ensure that rural residents across the country have equal access to a strong, reliable wireless network. I urge you to visit www.connectingruralamerica.org to learn more and to take a stand for rural America.

Casey Perry

Executive Director, Wisconsin Troopers Association