

Promoting the Safe and Orderly ‘Sunsetting’ of 3G Networks

The Federal Communications Commission can promote a smooth transition to 4G and 5G wireless networks by ensuring that increasingly outdated 3G wireless networks are taken out of operation in a safe and orderly manner. This “sunsetting” of 3G networks is an important undertaking but should be done in a manner that protects vulnerable populations and guarantees that essential services are not interrupted.

What is the 3G Sunset?

As part of the transition to faster, more efficient 4G and 5G LTE networks, service providers are shutting down their 3G CDMA and UMTS networks to make the spectrum used by 3G networks available for other uses.

Planned 3G Sunset Timetable

T-Mobile/Sprint:*	January 1, 2022
AT&T:	February 22, 2022
T-Mobile:	April 1, 2022
Verizon:	December 31, 2022

*Sprint’s CDMA network is owned and operated by T-Mobile

Many Americans and Essential Safety Services Still Rely on 3G

Researchers have estimated that [almost 20%](#) of Americans still rely on 3G networks. Many of these consumers are in particularly vulnerable or marginalized positions, including:

- **Elderly** and **low-income** consumers that favor—or need—older, simpler, or inexpensive devices that lack 4G or 5G compatibility.
- **Rural** and **prepaid** mobile customers who use service providers that rely on 3G networks to deliver service.

Besides mobile telephone service, other essential services such as central station alarm protection services rely on 3G networks, including:

- **Security systems** that protect millions of homes and businesses from theft, home invasion, fire, and other emergencies.
- **Personal emergency response systems** used by the elderly, individuals with serious medical conditions, and victims of domestic violence to summon emergency services.

Regulators Should Act Now to Promote an Orderly Transition

The Federal Communications Commission has the necessary authority to mitigate harm to the public, promote the public interest, and ensure a safe and orderly sunsetting of 3G networks by:

- **Gathering information.** The FCC can require parties to share information about network operations and their ability to obtain and distribute necessary hardware and equipment while protecting highly confidential and proprietary information from commercial rivals.
- **Mediating disputes.** The FCC is uniquely situated to mediate disputes between parties that rely on 3G service and those that are moving to rapidly sunset these networks. The FCC can, and should, require the parties to come together to negotiate a sunsetting schedule that is realistic and protects the interests of the public.
- **Examining the current timetables.** If necessary, the FCC can exercise regulatory authority over service providers to extend the current sunsetting timetables to ensure that access to vital services is not disrupted.