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Katie McGinty's

Bill Story felt invisible to RCN.

He said the cable company ignored him for a month after the Invisible Fence in his front yard was damaged during a cable installation project. "Three phone calls and a visit to their office and nothing," Story, of Lower Macungie Township, told me Wednesday. By Thursday morning, after a nudge from the Watchdog, Story no longer was the invisible man. An RCN employee parked in front of his home about 8:30 a.m. to hand-deliver a money order for \$114 to cover the repairs.



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 service to Story's neighborhood. The week of May 18, he found a flier on his door explaining that lines would be installed in the public right-of-way in his front yard.

The flier directed him to call if he had underground wiring for outside lighting, a

Spokeswoman Joanne Guerriero told me RCN and the contractor that did the work, whom she declined to identify, hadn't ignored Story. She said both called him and while neither spoke with him, messages were left. "We did log his phone calls," Guerriero said. Story said that didn't happen. If he had received messages, he said, he wouldn't have needed help from the Watchdog.

While I'll never get to the bottom of that, one thing is clear — Story didn't get paid until after I intervened. About 9 p.m. Wednesday, five hours after I called RCN, Story got a message from the contractor. A representative said he had just left Walmart with a money order, which RCN delivered Thursday. The cable company is extending

tug-of-war

sprinkler system or dog fence, presumably so the contractors wouldn't cut it. Story has an Invisible Fence to keep his two dogs contained. He said he called the number on the flier May 20 and left a message explaining that. He said his call wasn't returned, but he presumed the message had been received. That didn't stop the workers from cutting his fence wire May 28.

Story said he was home at the time and knew right away the boundary had been broken because the light on the control box indicated it. He hired a repair company and said it confirmed the line had been broken in the area where RCN's contractor had been working. Story said he called RCN that day seeking reimbursement for the repair cost. He said that call and another June 8 weren't returned. Fed up, he went to RCN's office in Bethlehem on June 12 and gave an employee a copy of the bill. He said she told him she faxed it to the service department and asked someone there to call him. When he hadn't been contacted a week later, he got in touch with the Watchdog. "Can you think that when RCN comes around to ask if I want their service, what my response will be?" Story told me in an email.

Guerriero told me it's rare for situations like this not to be resolved smoothly. She said RCN received Story's messages and passed that information to the contractor to handle. "We received it, we followed up, we thought it was taken care of," she said. Only after hearing from me did RCN realize it hadn't been taken care of. Story is satisfied with how his yard was restored after it was dug up. He said grass was planted, though he added soil, and it's hard to tell now that there were holes. He had taken photos of his property before the work started, just in case it wasn't restored to his satisfaction.

That's a good idea, one you should consider if a utility or cable company will be doing work in a public easement on your land. [I wrote a few years ago](#) about homeowners in another neighborhood who weren't happy about how their properties were treated during another RCN installation project. You can avoid problems like the one Story encountered by not burying wires in public easements. If they are there, mark them before work begins. PA One Call marks only utility lines, not private lines. Story told me he had arranged for his dog fence to be marked, at a cost of \$75, but RCN's work occurred the day before the marking was scheduled. – *Allentown Morning Call* "Watchdog" columnist

For three hours last August, almost all T-Mobile US Inc.'s about 50 million customers couldn't reach 911. The nationwide outage, disclosed on Friday, was at least the third major outage by a variety of telecom operators of the 911 call system in three years, raising concerns among federal regulators that the country's emergency response system is becoming more vulnerable. The system has evolved away from local networks connected by copper lines to a more national model based on Internet technologies. In the past any outage was localized. Now it can affect millions of people in multiple states, whether they use cellphones or landlines.

Regulators slapped T-Mobile with a record \$17.5 million fine for the malfunction that debilitated the part of carrier's network that handles emergency calls. The FCC is trying to take steps to prevent such service failures. The agency recently adopted rules designed to encourage telecom companies to share information about outages so they can be resolved more quickly. It also asked carriers for their input on how the 911 network can be designed in a more robust way and has pushed measures aimed at adding additional features to 911, such as the ability to send text messages and improve location accuracy of cellphone callers.

"A single 911 call today can involve several companies operating in different locations across the country, and that means a single failure in one location can leave people without 911 service across multiple states, indeed across the nation," David Simpson, the Federal Communications Commission's head of public safety, said in a speech to

state telecom regulators earlier this month. T-Mobile said it doesn't know how many callers tried and failed to reach 911 during its outage last August. The FCC says it is unaware of any fatalities due to any of the outages but says there are roughly 27,000 calls to 911 an hour on average placed across all carriers. A T-Mobile spokeswoman blamed its 911 service loss on a glitch during a regular software update. The carrier has since improved its systems, she said, adding that the "safety of our customers is extremely important."

In an earlier incident involving different carriers, Alicia Cappola of Everett, Wash., was awakened after 1 a.m. to the sound of someone trying to break down her front door. When she tried to call 911, she got a busy signal. "The first thing I thought was I dialed wrong," she said. "There's no way 911 is busy." Ms. Cappola tried 911 three dozen more times but never could get through. She worried for herself and her 5-year-old twins who were asleep in their room near the front door. The intruder eventually came in through a window, but left after she confronted him with a kitchen knife. "It's such a helpless feeling to call 911 and it's not going through," she said.

After the intruder left, Ms. Cappola used her cellphone to search Google for the 10-digit number to the local police department and called them directly. Ms. Cappola says she is considering legal action. The current emergency response system dates back to 1968 when the first 911 call was made and slowly it spread across the country as the go-to number to dial in emergencies. In 1999, Congress mandated 911 be the national emergency number and under federal telecom laws, carriers are obliged to provide access to 911 at all times.

But in recent years, telecom operators have been shifting to new, Internet-based technologies that are faster and less expensive to maintain from the old copper line system. That allows phone operators in one state to route an emergency call through network hubs in distant locations. Nationwide 911 outages during the landline era would have been unthinkable, government officials say, because the nation's phone network that was built over the course of a century relied mostly on local facilities. If a storm hit the coast of Washington it might knock out 911 service but only in that area. The interconnected nature of new systems means storms or software glitches in one part of the country can shut down 911 in another. At the same time, the country's 911 system has had a hard time keeping up with Americans shifting to cellphones from landlines.

When callers dial 911 from a landline their address is visible to the emergency dispatcher. But in the case of cellphone callers, the location often is only accurate to a few hundred meters and sometimes dispatchers may only see the location of the cell tower that is routing the call. More than 45% of American households rely exclusively on cellphones and don't have a landline, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As a result, the first question most dispatchers now ask callers is for their location, not the nature of the emergency. This despite the fact that consumers can use Google Maps on their smartphones to get driving directions, Uber to order a taxi or WhatsApp to share their precise location with friends. Earlier this year, the FCC doled out fines totaling more than \$20 million to Verizon Communications Inc., CenturyLink Inc. and its Colorado-based 911 service provider Intrado Inc. for an April 2014 outage that affected Ms. Cappola and 11 million others for six hours in seven states from California to Pennsylvania.

Engineers working for 911 service provider Intrado at its call routing center in Englewood, Colo., didn't immediately notice the glitch that blocked Ms. Cappola's 911 call because they were already working to solve a separate 911 outage taking place in Oregon. In all, 6,600 911 calls never reached emergency dispatchers in the April 2014 event, the FCC said. "The introduction of new technologies has also introduced new vulnerabilities that cannot be ignored," the FCC's Mr. Simpson said in an email on Friday. – *Wall Street Journal*

Talks between Starz, the premium pay TV service, and telecommunications giant AT&T appear to be stalling, which could lead to a loss of popular Starz and Encore programming for some subscribers. The two companies have been negotiating a new distribution pact for several months but have not agreed on key deal terms, according to a person close to the situation who was not authorized to publicly discuss the matter.

The deal has been extended at least once. However, that extension is set to expire before the end of July. It was unclear Friday whether Starz would grant AT&T another extension. "Starz is in ongoing negotiations with AT&T U-verse to continue distributing its 30 Starz and Encore channels and services at a fair and reasonable rate," a Starz representative said in a statement. "Without a new agreement, the millions of AT&T customers who have chosen to subscribe and pay for Starz and Encore will be at risk of losing these channels and the popular original programming like 'Power' and 'Outlander,' as well as thousands of movies," the Starz representative said. The Starz networks boast nearly 24 million subscribers nationwide, and its companion Encore channels separately have more than 33 million subscribers.

AT&T U-verse provides TV service to about 6 million customers in the U.S. Many elect to receive Starz and Encore as an add-on service. "We are disappointed that Starz has chosen to take our ongoing negotiations public," an AT&T representative said Friday night. "We continue to work diligently to reach a resolution. Beyond that, we cannot comment." A breakdown in the distribution talks would come at an awkward time. AT&T is believed to be in the final stages of securing federal approval for its \$49-billion takeover of DirecTV. That merger would make AT&T the nation's largest pay-TV provider, with more than 25 million customers.

Starz, which is a publicly traded company, is not as diversified as other entertainment companies. It relies heavily on subscription fee revenue from pay-TV distributors, such as Time Warner Cable, DirecTV and AT&T. Starz has had a particularly strong season with its original series. The drama "Power" is in its second season, drawing more than 6 million viewers per episode. The show performs well among African American viewers, attracting more black viewers than any other scripted program on a premium cable channel in nearly a decade.

"Starz has enjoyed a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with AT&T until now," Starz said in its statement. "We are hopeful AT&T will negotiate in good faith and that we will reach a fair agreement that allows its customers to continue to get great entertainment at a good value." – *Los Angeles Times*



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