



Control Number: 50664



Item Number: 114

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March 27, 2020

Central Records Filing Clerk  
Public Utility Commission of Texas  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78711



**Re:** Project No. 50664; *Issues Related to the State of Disaster for the Coronavirus Disease 2019*

Project No. 37277; *Project for Submitting Emergency Operations Plan and Notifications of Emergency Operations Exercises*

Dear Filing Clerk:

In response to the Public Utility Commission of Texas' (Commission) request for interested parties to inform the Commission of initiatives related to COVID-19, I am writing to provide a second summary of actions that Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc. (Eastex or Cooperative) has taken thus far related to COVID-19. Eastex appreciates the rapid response of all levels of government while our state attempts to slow the spread of the virus, and Eastex is working hard to do its part to help citizens within our service area remain connected through this difficult time. With an increasing number of counties in which Eastex serves issuing shelter-in-place orders, Eastex has decided to operate under its Emergency Operations Plan and is therefore filing this letter in both of the above-referenced proceedings. While working through an unprecedented increase in demand for services, Eastex continues to monitor the outbreak of COVID-19 and adjust business practices to protect customers and employees so that we can continue to provide reliable critical communications services to our communities.

On March 26, 2020, Eastex issued the attached press release to our community. Additionally, since our initial summary of activities filed on March 19, 2020, Eastex has taken the following additional steps to assist the communities where we provide service:

- On March 20, 2020, Eastex filed a new informational notice in Tariff Control No. 50693 seeking Commission approval to reduce up-front costs for residences with students for the next two months in order to promote distance learning efforts.
- Eastex's non-regulated affiliate is waiving connection fees and providing two months of free broadband Internet service to qualifying customers within the Cooperative's service area to promote distance learning opportunities.
- Eastex is working with local school districts in its service area to establish numerous Wi-Fi hot spots at various locations throughout the community

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permitting students to access distance learning resources provided by the affected school districts. Thus far, Eastex anticipates establishing multiple free Wi-Fi hotspots for the Livingston, Big Sandy, Coldsprings-Oakhurst, Waskom, Elysian Fields, Rusk, Laneville, and Henderson School Districts, but has contacted all school districts to ensure that they are aware that the Cooperative is available to assist. For those new hotspots that require construction, Eastex has prioritized those efforts consistent with its approved tariffs and the Cooperative's Emergency Operations Plan.

- Between March 16, 2020 and March 26, 2020, Eastex received 166 new service requests, of which 68 will require new construction. Eastex is offering overtime pay to installation employees and is working with its third-party installation contractors to meet this unprecedented increase in demand for services as quickly as possible.
- Eastex is increasing cybersecurity practices and customer education concerning COVID-19 phishing scams in an effort to prevent threats to our network and our customers.
- Eastex continues to monitor for traffic spikes in its network to ensure that it can meet increased demand as more customers work from home and implement other social distancing tactics.
- Eastex is working with county officials in an effort to ensure that its employees will be able to travel for work during any shelter-in-place orders so that the Cooperative will be able to continue to provide critical services to its customers.

In addition to the above efforts, Eastex's executive team continues to meet regularly to ensure that critical information is shared. The undersigned attends daily COVID-19 call with the Texas Department of State Health Services to obtain and share information related to the pandemic. Additionally, the undersigned has provided information from Shawn Hazard, the Commission's Emergency Management Coordinator, with the other thirty members of the Texas Telephone Association providing access to the Texas Division of Emergency Management's website containing daily situation reports, which includes updated information on shelter-in-place orders throughout the state.

Eastex continues to monitor governmental agencies' websites including the Governor's Office, the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Center for Disease Control, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Commission, and will take further actions, as appropriate, to protect our customers and our employees. The Cooperative appreciates the Commission's leadership and cooperation as we work through this pandemic together. To the extent that the Commission feels that additional precautions are appropriate, Eastex is prepared to work with the Commission on such precautions.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (903) 854-1290 or at [wes@eastex.com](mailto:wes@eastex.com).

Very truly yours,



Wes Robinson  
Director of Regulatory Affairs

Attachment





## **PRESS RELEASE – MARCH 26, 2020**

### **Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc. takes additional steps in wake of COVID-19**

As we respond to COVID-19, the health and safety of our customers and employees remains our top priority. The work we do is critical to thousands of people and companies throughout our service territory, and we are committed to being there when our customers and colleagues need us most. Below are some of the ways that we are supporting these commitments.

- **We are keeping our customers and workers safe.** All of our staff continues to practice the CDC's recommended physical distancing, sanitation and hygiene practices. While our business offices remain closed, our drive-throughs remain open for business during normal business hours, and customers can contact us via phone or via email at [customersupport@eastex.com](mailto:customersupport@eastex.com).
- **We are keeping our customers connected.** Our field technicians are on the front lines, entering customers' homes and businesses to ensure they have essential internet, telephone and security services, and we couldn't be more grateful for their work commitment. Because we are deemed an essential business, we are working with county officials where shelter-in-place orders are being effectuated to ensure we can continue to restore and connect service for homes, businesses, government offices and critical first responders.
- **We are helping students connect to virtual classrooms.** We are proactively working with our local schools to create new wi-fi hotspots so that children can stay connected to educational content during school closures. We have also extended promotional discounts to households with students to make it easier and less costly to establish or upgrade home internet connections.
- **We are increasing cybersecurity measures and critical network monitoring.** COVID-related phishing attacks are on the rise. Accordingly, we have increased cybersecurity training and tactics to not only protect our network, but to protect our customers. We are also experiencing dramatic spikes in service demands and are taking all necessary steps to ensure we have adequate network capacity to meet demands.
- **We are keeping customers informed.** We are distributing vital COVID-19 news and information via email, news outlets and through social media channels. We encourage all customers to ensure we have their most current email address, and to follow us on facebook @eastexcoop for the most up-to-date news and information about Eastex activities.

Eastex will continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and do everything we can to help our members and the communities we serve. We thank our customers for their patience and understanding as we work through this challenge together.

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