



CASE STUDY:

Kentucky Develops Statewide Satellite Network for Emergency Situations

The Situation

Kentucky, like all states, is prone to disasters of all varieties, such as flooding, tornadoes, and earthquakes. Additionally, potential emergencies ranging from a pandemic flu outbreak to an anthrax attack are an increasing concern among public safety officials throughout the state.

In 2005, the state received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) requiring implementation of a backup/redundant communications system between all hospitals and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) and clinics statewide.

The Challenge

To meet the communications objective in the HRSA grant, health and medical facilities across Kentucky needed to find a reliable — but affordable — communications solution that they could depend on during an emergency situation, even when terrestrial service was unavailable.

Without a statewide infrastructure to leverage, building a new system was not an option due to the limited amount of funding available for the project. The Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) was forced to seek a solution that supported the needs of the health and medical community while meeting the requirements of the HRSA grant program. In particular, KDPH sought equipment with dispatch radio features to allow personnel to be able to communicate one-to-one or one-to-many.

The Solution

KDPH found its solution with SkyTerra Communication's push-to-talk satellite phones.

Using the HRSA grant, KDPH purchased 355 units for distribution to health facilities statewide.

Regions across the state were allotted satellite phones based on their size and provided general guidance on where to place the phones throughout the area. After all health facilities received a phone — some regions then provided SkyTerra phones to emergency management agencies and professionals such as EMS and regional HAZMAT teams.



Ice Storms Caused Widespread Damage in February 2009

"Being able to communicate is critical to successful emergency management and without the ability to communicate it would be impossible for health and public safety professionals to coordinate and collaborate on missions," explains Drew Chandler, IT and communications manager for KDPH's Preparedness Branch. "SkyTerra's equipment ensures that, at the push of a button, hospitals and health facilities across Kentucky are able to send a message to their colleagues and work together to best serve the public's needs."

SkyTerra Communications Inc.

10802 Parkridge Boulevard, Reston, VA 20191-4334

T: +1 703 390 2700

www.skyterra.com



To enable multi-agency interoperable communications, KDPH used SkyTerra's satellite network to set up nine Kentucky-specific statewide talkgroups and has since joined several regional and national satellite mutual aid radio talkgroups (SMART™) operating on the SkyTerra network.

These talkgroups allow one-to-one push-to-talk "dispatch style" and one-to-many "broadcast style" communications and are used for both day-to-day operations as well as in times of emergency.



"The talkgroups provide a means of immediate communication between health and public safety professionals in and out of the state during an emergency," says Chandler.

"For instance, in 2008 strong winds from the remnants of Hurricane Ike damaged the terrestrial infrastructure in several parts of Kentucky, leading to a Presidential Disaster Declaration. With no cellular service or Internet connection for nearly a week in some areas, satellite became the only form of communication available and the talkgroups were heavily relied upon to coordinate rescue efforts to local citizens."

To ensure all hospitals and health facilities, as well as other public safety agencies with SkyTerra's satellite phones, are prepared for a potential disaster, KDPH developed the DPH Satellite Communications Training Module — an online training module that includes a step-by-step tutorial on how to operate the satellite phone and talkgroups. KDPH encourages facilities with a satellite phone to train employees on how to operate the device and requires quarterly testing.

The ability for health and medical personnel to stay in touch and keep each other informed during a disaster is invaluable. The statewide satellite network developed by KDPH ensures that hospitals and health facilities across Kentucky have a reliable backup communications system that they can depend on in times of emergency.

SkyTerra Communications Inc.

10802 Parkridge Boulevard, Reston, VA 20191-4334

T: +1 703 390 2700

www.skyterra.com