



## **CASE STUDY:**

### Statewide Talkgroup on SkyTerra's Network Became the Saving Grace During Katrina

#### **The Situation**

Hurricane Katrina knocked out more than three million customer phone lines in the Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama area. The wire line communications network sustained enormous damage to the switching centers as did the local wireless networks with up to 2,000 cell sites out of service. Radio towers were equally affected.

Of the 41 broadcast stations located in the New Orleans area only two AM and one FM station continued to transmit in the wake of the hurricane. Thirty eight 911 call centers went down. Basically, the entire communications infrastructure on the Mississippi Gulf Coast was destroyed.

As a result, in the first hours and days after Katrina made landfall satellite was the only reliable means of communications.

#### **The Challenge**

Having reliable communications that are immune to destruction and congestion of terrestrial networks and provide communications interoperability. Unfortunately, in Katrina's wake, when communication was needed most, for the majority, it simply wasn't there.

#### **The Solution**

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) and SkyTerra played a key role. At the time, the MDWFP law enforcement satellite radio system was the only one in the state at the time and it was one of the ways by which the Governor's office was able to contact NEMA and FEMA. Cell towers were down. All power was out. Land lines were gone.



*Hurricane Katrina did incredible damage across six states in her seven day dance of destruction...damage not only by the hurricane itself, but from wind, rain and exceptionally large ocean surges along the coast. A total of 32 reported tornados, some as far east and north as Georgia and Tennessee were also associated with Katrina.*

The department installed their satellite two-way radio system from SkyTerra in 2003 after intensive research into a variety of communication systems. They had a number of districts that could not communicate with each other. In their business, reliable communications is critical. After switching to satellite radios, these officers were able to get rid of their cell phones and eliminate the costs of maintaining their old terrestrial towers. Satellite service provides complete coverage for the entire state.

Access to talk groups connects officers 24/7 with the MDWFP headquarters in Jackson. A CPI interface in the vehicle is used to allow cross-banding with land mobile radios so that officers continue to have communications as they move away from their vehicles. The central dispatch centers for Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and the MDWFP are linked to provide a coordinated response in the event of an incident or emergency.

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