

## Satellite Technology's Role In Police and Public-Safety Emergency Communications

*The Escambia County Mobile Command Center and Sheriff's team*  
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*Photo: Left to right: Chief Deputy Larry Smith, Sheriff Ron McNesby, Captain Larry Aiken, Sam Reitzammer*

Last March, the [Escambia County, Fla.](#), Sheriff's Office SWAT team responded to an emergency call involving a shooting victim and a possibly armed, barricaded suspect. The Sheriff's Mobile Command Center also responded as standard procedure, to assist with any on-site communications that might be needed. An incident command post, equipped with broadband satellite service, was established in the command center from which SWAT operations were coordinated.



The Mobile Command Center's satellite system was activated and within 10 minutes investigators at the scene were conducting research over the Sheriff's Office network. As a result of this research, the suspect and victim were both quickly identified. Upon entering the residence, the SWAT team determined that the suspect had not returned to the residence as thought and the victim was dead. Immediately, pictures of the suspect were obtained via satellite and provided to

the deputies on the scene. This enabled instantaneous distribution of vital information to law enforcement officers on the street, a process that in the past would have taken hours or days.

"The satellite system allows us to respond to any critical incident and provide on-scene command, control and communications," said Capt. Larry Aiken, officer-in-charge of Mobile Command Operations for the Escambia Sheriff's Office.

"Satellite increases the efficiency of the office and aids coordination with other agencies," added Sheriff Ron McNesby.

Through [Ground Control](#) of San Luis Obispo, Calif., a reseller of Hughes Network Systems, the Sheriff's Office fielded the Direcway mobile satellite system and the Business Plus mobile two-way broadband satellite in November 2002. Through this purchase, not only was it able to provide broadband access for five on-board workstations to the data back in the office, but officers were able to receive DirecTV service and as such, view the news as it was being broadcast.

The Mobile Command Center is now able to operate as an independent dispatch center as well as a command and control center. Applications that are accessed and operated from the satellite system include the SmartCOP CAD system. The system gives the department access to state and federal criminal information databases as well as state and federal Web sites such as the Florida Criminal Justice Network, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Department of Emergency Management and the United States Department of Homeland Security.

With homeland security influencing the way state and local law enforcement agencies operate, redundant communications are now a necessity, rather than a luxury -- and satellite helps fill that need. In addition to data network connectivity, Sheriff McNesby has also added Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, allowing the Sheriff's Office to connect to its PBX system at the main station. This provides redundant communications with the same benefits as the main telephone system such as four-digit extension and intercom dialing. These benefits are available to the command center regardless of its location.

"As homeland security efforts intensify, the need for emergency operations has become vital," said McNesby. "Satellite has allowed us to build the redundancy necessary to ensure that the Escambia County Sheriff's Office is prepared for every contingency."

The Sheriff's Office looked hard at other solutions and alternatives. The objective was clear: To ensure that the Mobile Command Center can operate independent of the Sheriff's Dispatch Center, provide the same capabilities necessary to operate as a remote dispatch center, and provide access to network resources in order to operate as an independent Command and Control center. In addition, the solution needed to meet these five criteria:

- Offer secure, wireless service
- Provide sufficient bandwidth
- Operational from any remote location within the state of Florida
- Support the use of a Virtual Private Network (VPN)
- Cost effective
- Easily deployed

After considering other satellite solutions, the HNS Directway system offered by Ground Control was selected.

"The application for this technology in law enforcement/public safety is limitless," said Aiken. "Information is key to the success of any public safety agency, whether law enforcement, fire or health. Satellite puts that information at your fingertips."

For more information, please contact Ground Control at [www.groundcontrol.com](http://www.groundcontrol.com) or by phone at 800-773-7168