Case Study

Satellite Technology’s Role In Police and Public Safety Emergency Communications
Escambia County, Florida Sheriff’s Department

Although the value of information in law enforcement has been a constant, the tools used by police officers to send and receive vital data have changed dramatically over the years: from foot patrols and call boxes, to radio cars and walkie-talkie radios, to — today — police units equipped with advanced satellite-enabled data systems.

A recent example of the continued evolution of law enforcement communications technology can be found in the experiences of Escambia County, Florida Sheriff’s Department.

In March of this year the Escambia County Sheriff’s Department SWAT team responded to an emergency call involving a shooting victim and a possibly armed barricaded suspect. As the result of the SWAT response, the county’s Mobile Command Center also responded as standard procedure, to assist with any on-site communications that might be needed. An incident command post was established in the command center and SWAT operations were coordinated from that location.

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 back in the office. As a result of this research the suspect and victim were both quickly identified. Upon entering the residence, the SWAT 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 officers on the scene. This allowed for the instantaneous distribution of vital information to officers on the street, a process that in the past would have taken hours or days.

How They Got There
Besides well-trained and professional police officers, what helped to make the mission a success was the Escambia County Sheriff’s Department recent acquisition and fielding of a broadband-via-satellite system.
Partnering with Ground Control of San Luis Obispo, Calif., a value-added reseller of Hughes Network Systems of Germantown, MD, Escambia County fielded the IG-2500 mobile satellite system and the Business Plus mobile two-way broadband satellite service (called DIRECWAY®) in November 2002. Through this purchase not only were they able to provide broadband access for 5 on-board workstations to the data back in the office but also they were able to receive DirecTV® service and as such view the news as it was being broadcast.

“The system allows us to respond to any critical incident and provide on-scene command, control and communications,” said Lt. Larry Aiken, officer-in-charge of mobile command operations for the Escambia Sheriff’s Department. “Satellite increases the efficiency of the respondents and aids coordination with other agencies,” he added.

**Leveraging Satellite for Command, Control and Communication**

Satellite has enabled the department to connect their mobile command post to sheriff department’s main network, thus allowing for officers in the mobile command post to access files and records instantaneously – vital in a emergency situation or crime scene incident. The Mobile Command Center is now able to operate as an independent dispatch center as well as a command and control center. The applications that are accessed and operated from the satellite system include the Computer Aided Dispatch program (SmartCAD provided by SmartCOP Inc.) which is part of a full suite of Public Safety software to include records management and personnel programs. The DIRECWAY solution also gives the department the capability to access 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 are operating, redundant communications is now a necessity, rather than a luxury -- and satellite is helping to solve that. In addition to data network connectivity, Escambia has also added Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony.

The VoIP system allows the department to connect to their PBX system at the main sheriff’s station via the DIRECWAY service. This provides redundant communications.
systems and provides the same benefits of the main telephone system such as four-digit extension dialing 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. The DIRECWAY® satellite service has allowed us to build the redundancy necessary to ensure that the Escambia County Sheriff’s Office is prepared for every contingency,” said Lt. Aiken.

**Meeting the Requirements**

Like any good purchasing decision, the Sheriff’s Department 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 station, 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
- Able to support the use of a Virtual Private Network (VPN) client to establish a secure tunnel
- Cost effective, and
- Easily deployed

After considering other satellite solutions, the Hughes DIRECWAY® system offered by Ground Control was the obvious choice. Notes Lt. Aiken, “Ground Control was able to provide the service and support that was necessary for us to accomplish our objective.”

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

**About Ground Control**

As a Platinum-level HNS Value Added Reseller (VAR), Ground Control ([www.groundcontrol.com](http://www.groundcontrol.com)) is a leading provider of mobile and fixed satellite Internet access and application solutions for business. Ground Control delivers equipment services and support via the HNS DIRECWAY satellite and content delivery network, all backed by its world-class technical professionals. Ground Control provides businesses with cutting-edge Internet resources and the ability to deploy, manage, and scale mission-critical Internet operations for optimum performance and cost efficiency.

**About Hughes Network Systems**

Hughes Network Systems, Inc. (HNS), a wholly owned subsidiary of Hughes Electronics Corporation (HUGHES), is the world's leading provider of broadband satellite network solutions for businesses and consumers, with more than 500,000 systems ordered or
shipped to customers in 85 countries. HNS pioneered the development of high-speed satellite Internet access services, which it markets globally under the DIRECWAY® brand. Hughes Network Systems counts among its customers in the Emergency Services/Crisis Management/Homeland Security sectors, the Florida Division of Emergency Management and the California Office of Emergency Services, and federal and local authorities in Texas who relied on advanced mobile satellite technology to play a critical role in remote recovery efforts for debris from the space shuttle Columbia.

Headquartered outside Washington, D.C., in Germantown, Maryland, USA, HNS maintains sales and support offices worldwide. The earnings of HUGHES, a unit of General Motors Corporation, are used to calculate the earnings attributable to the General Motors Class H common stock (NYSE: GMH). To learn more about HNS, please visit www.hns.com.

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