

Satellite Technology's Role In Police and Public Safety Emergency Communications— Escambia County, Florida, Office of the Sheriff



Although the value of information in law enforcement has been a constant, the tools used by law enforcement 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—law enforcement vehicles equipped with advanced satellite broadband systems.



Chief Deputy Larry Smith, Sheriff Ron McNesby, Captain Larry Aiken, and Officer Sam Reitzammer

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

In March of this year, the Sheriff's Office SWAT team responded to an emergency call involving a shooting victim and a possibly armed, barricaded suspect. In conjunction with the SWAT response, 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 DIRECWAY® broadband satellite service by Hughes Network Systems, 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. 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 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.





How They Got There

Besides well-trained and professional deputies, what helped to make the mission a success was the Sheriff's Office recent acquisition and fielding of a broadband-via-satellite system.

Through Ground Control of San Luis Obispo, Calif., a value-added reseller of Hughes Network Systems of Germantown, MD, the Sheriff's Office fielded the DIRECWAY IG-2500 mobile satellite system and the Business Plus mobile two-way broadband satellite in November 2002. Through this purchase, not only were they able to provide broadband access for five on-board workstations to the data back in the office, but they were able to receive DIRECTV® service and thus view the news as it was being broadcast.

"The satellite system allows us to respond to any critical incident and provide on-scene command, control and communications," said Capt. Larry Aiken, officer-

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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, under whose leadership the equipment was introduced.

Leveraging Satellite for Command, Control and Communication

Satellite enables the Sheriff's Office to connect their mobile command post to the main network, thus giving the deputies in the mobile command post access to files and records instantaneously—vital in an 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. 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 records management and personnel programs. The DIRECWAY solution also 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 is 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 with the VoIP system, allowing the sheriff's office to connect to their PBX system at the main sheriff's station via the DIRECWAY service. This provides redundant communications with the same benefits as 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. Satellite has allowed us to build the redundancy necessary to ensure that the Escambia County Sheriff's Office is prepared for every contingency," said McNesby.

Meeting the Requirements

Like any good purchasing decision, 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
- Operate from any remote location within the state of Florida
- Support the use of a Virtual Private Network (VPN)
- Be cost effective
- Be easily deployed

After considering other satellite solutions, the HNS DIRECWAY system offered by Ground Control was the obvious choice.

"The application 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," said Aiken.

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About Ground Control

As a Platinum-level HNS Value Added Reseller (VAR), Ground Control (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 The DIRECTV Group, Inc., is the world's leading provider of broadband satellite network solutions for businesses, government, and consumers, with more than 750,000 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.

Headquartered outside Washington, D.C., in Germantown, Maryland, USA, HNS maintains sales and support offices worldwide. The DIRECTV Group, Inc. (NYSE:DTV) is 34 percent owned by Fox Entertainment Group, which is approximately 82 percent owned by News Corporation Ltd. For additional information, please visit our Web site: www.hns.com.

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