Primetech and Aireshelta support improved flooding and emergency response

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's ground breaking new Incident Command Unit, with Ka-band communications from Primetech and an extra large shelter from Aireshelta, is redefining how ICUs can be used to support single and multi-agency emergency response.



When major flooding hit the Thames Valley in February this year, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) needed to make sure that command communications systems worked at maximum efficiency, helping command teams deploy their resources and those of the other emergency services and organisations involved in multi-agency response, at maximum efficiency.

Incident Command Unit

Fortunately it had a new Incident Command Unit equipped with high capacity Ka-band mobile satellite broadband from Primetech to provide the communications networks needed to deliver a more joined-up response. With Primetech's Ka-band systems, the service was able to provide high bandwidth mobile satellite broadband capacity for emergency command teams supporting all local emergency services and agencies.

"We wouldn't have been able to provide the level of information transfer which they achieved without the Ka-band communications systems of the ICU vehicle."

Rory Coulter, Head of Logistics at Surrey FRS, observes, "Three bronze commands were running for the February flooding at Sunbury, Walton and Chertsey. It was decided that Chertsey would be the lead of the three stations for the flooding and that the ICU would be based there.

"Initially it was set up at the front of the station for bronze command. It was later decided to move the command team into the building, but still to use the facilities that the vehicle could provide, using the satellite to give them a better network. So we got a far better link to the command structure using the vehicle than by using the station itself. It was deployed for around two weeks, for the worst of the flooding around the weekend of Valentine's Day, the week before and the week after.

"Ka-band gave us a much better broadband capacity than we could achieve within the station. But it wasn't only us using the station, it was all the other agencies - the police, the HART teams, the local authority, plus volunteers. The station became the hub of everything for our area of the river Thames. We wouldn't have been able to provide the level of information transfer which they achieved without the Ka-band communications systems of the ICU vehicle."

The unit is also able to collect and transmit High Definition video imagery from around an incident ground, from body-worn and aerial cameras, back to command HQ. This represents a major breakthrough in command communications.

Shelter

Another unique feature of the Surrey ICU is the space provided by its very large L-shaped shelter, supplied by leading shelter manufacturer Aireshelta. With the space provided by the shelter, the unit is able to handle, simultaneously, a diverse range of command functions, from IT and communications support to command meetings, administration and briefings. Aireshelta shelters are made in new, lightweight fabrics, reducing the weight carried and being easier to deploy. The shelter creates a number of extra work spaces around the vehicle, tripling it in size.

In addition to being very big, it is free standing as well. So, if the service has an incident such as flooding, it can set the shelter and vehicle up and still be doing incident command in the shelter if the vehicle has to be driven away.

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