

Post Katrina Communications

Did you know that... that the Communications confusion which followed Hurricane Katrina was avoidable? It wasn't a matter of FEMA or drowned buses.

The facts may surprise you. Available Technology was unused and virtually un-mentioned by 'The Mainstream Press'. You didn't hear a word about a simple solution available from the beginning.

An assumption was made as Katrina ground into the Gulf Coast like a chain saw, that 'it wouldn't be that bad'.

Without the devastation soon to follow at New Orleans, the situation in Mississippi and Alabama deteriorated to a disaster of Biblical proportions swiftly. This debacle was not even reported to much of the outside world; outside local zones of devastation, because of the wind. Few if any realized that Cell phone and Radio towers, including many Amateur (Ham) sites were unable to function.

The 'usual' method of communication after a devastating storm like Katrina, as illustrated after Hurricane Andrew, is Police and Fire mobile units, Amateur Radio, and news crews as they make their way into the Disaster Areas.

After Andrew the South Florida Counties were so thoroughly pulverised that most assumed that their local few blocks had been the worst hit and help was on the way from areas of lesser damage. It was well after dawn on that Monday morning that it became obvious through helicopter reports, that an unprecedented disaster had occurred.

Some reports did get out over the airwaves. A few Amateur Radio Operators and Police and Fire did report local damage. Again, none of these people had any idea how bad things really were. Many of the People and organizations these reports would normally have been aimed at were themselves in dire straits. Even Homestead Air Force Base was paralysed, later to be assessed unrecoverable as an Air Force Base.

Now let's return to the Gulf Coast on another Monday Morning thirteen years later. The storm surge pushed inland with the help of hurricane force winds, over 20 miles inland in some areas. While early evacuations saved countless lives along the gulf coast, nothing could protect the infrastructure of the towns, counties and states. Much of the highway systems were junked to the point that even the National Guard could not get all their Heavy equipment into the hardest hit areas to dig for Survivors. The Interstates were unusable for miles.

Satellite Phone GSM: Consider a scenario where at least the Civil Defense organizations, National Guard, FEMA, Police, Sherrifs and Fire Departments, especially 'First Responders', had at the ready Satellite Phones. Consider this scenario further in that Disaster planning and training had gone before using a combination of Satellite phones and Mobile radios that could work without a repeater on a general shared frequency.

The stumbling blocks inherent in an massive emergency situation could have been recognised and surmounted much earlier after the worst of Katrina had passed. With Cell Phones down (what's new), and radio frequency sharing a virtual tower of babel there was minimal co-ordinated communications between those on the scene and those coming from the outside.

Something as simple as telling a National Guard Convoy that they 'couldn't get here from there', would have helped so much. Satellite Phone GSM

It helps no one to look back and find fault beyond learning from our mistakes. One conclusion on the Communications situation is that at a minimum Satellite Phones be standard equipment for Civil Defense Organizations . Cell Phones are fine for normal use, but they depend on intense local infrastructure including local power. There are batteries of course, depending on re-charge of course. Satellite Phones are now 'in the range of private use' and have the same features available in 'Cell Phones' of everyday use.

Satellite Phones have been around for a few years now. They are used in the Persian Gulf to great effect. It would be criminal after 'The Year of the Hurricane' Not to press for Satellite Phone Technology inclusion in ALL Disaster Planning. This is true from City level To State and Federal.

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