

Reconnecting after Disaster



In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, citizens of Gulfport, Miss. were surprised to see a vast, brightly colored tent stretching across the parking lot of the local Mardi Gras supply store. Known as Nevada One, the tent houses a self-contained National Institutes of Health facility for onsite medical care.

Sitting atop a fence post behind the tent is a Hughes DW broadband satellite dish connecting the hospital to the outside world.

Satellite communications played a crucial role in the lives of thousands of people affected by the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Terrestrial systems were so disrupted that even people whose homes survived had no telephone, cable TV, or Internet access. They were told it could be months before even basic telephone and data services would be restored.

Meanwhile, satellite communications were quickly put to work. The team at Hughes and its value-added resellers worked closely with relief organizations in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida to rapidly deploy emergency Hughes DW satellite terminals and service to reconnect people with their families, find medical care, and obtain needed services. Here are just some of their stories.

Bringing Medical and Financial Services

- ◆ U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs medical centers used Hughes satellite services to access patient records, order medications, and provide connections for veterans to connect with family members.

- ◆ The Florida Department of Health transferred important medical information to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta via transportable Hughes DW terminals.
- ◆ JPMorgan Chase Bank deployed Hughes DW dishes on their automatic teller machines at various locations within the hurricane-ravaged region to disburse Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds to those in need.

Enterprises Get Local Offices Back Up and Running

- ◆ In New Orleans, the Coca Cola Bottling Co. contracted church camps to shelter homeless employees, and provided onsite internet cafés using Hughes broadband satellite services to connect people and to provide back office operations for the company.
- ◆ Tom Curtis, IT manager at Northrop Grumman Sperry Marine in Harvey, La., said the fact that his new Hughes satellite system performed consistently through heavy rains and winds was "a real testament to the installation and the inherent stability of the technology." Curtis added that Northrop Grumman plans to keep the satellite service active for several months because of its excellent back-up potential.

Relief Organizations Respond

According to David Wick, IT Support for Samaritan's Purse, an international relief and development agency, the organization used the Hughes service to obtain accurate local mapping information, which was vital for the immediate effectiveness of its disaster relief unit stationed in Gulfport, Miss. The dependability of the Hughes service "was particularly highlighted by the poor reliability and lack of other Internet connection methods in the initial period after the hurricane hit," said Wick.



Hughes DW terminals and services are quickly put to work in the Gulf region to reconnect families, provide relief services, and disburse FEMA funds.

Getting the News Out

Throughout the Gulf region, Associated Press reporters used multiple Hughes satellite systems to report news from constantly shifting locations. The flexibility of the systems allowed comprehensive Katrina coverage, then rapid re-deployment to cover the Rita news stories. AP staff relied on Hughes for basic voice service using the built-in VoIP capability, as well as for Internet access, corporate e-mail, and streaming IP videos.



Satellite Helps Small Businesses and Animals Too

Besides local, state, and federal government agencies and large enterprises, many small businesses and individuals came to rely on DIRECWAY after the hurricanes for broadband connectivity to the outside world.

- ◆ In New Orleans, Hughes worked with a communications consultant to set up Hughes service where roads had been cleared and a 24-hour natural gas generator was available for electricity. The DW terminal was connected to a Wi-Fi network, providing wireless Internet access for a number of small businesses and individuals.
- ◆ In Mississippi, a home-based medical transcriptionist whose local phone connection had been out for days desperately needed a communication link in order to perform her job. Generator power provided electricity to power a DW terminal that enabled her to transcribe and transmit vitally important medical reports.
- ◆ The Best Friends Animal Society, a Utah-based non-profit organization that provided a lifeline for hundreds of injured and abandoned pets, used Hughes services to report rescue actions and communicate with an animal-rescue database.

An Excellent Back-up System

Because satellite technology is mobile, robust, and easily deployed and provisioned—all vital elements in an emergency—it quickly filled the breach for downed terrestrial communications after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"Satellite communications provides vital links when disaster strikes," said Pradman Kaul, chairman and CEO of Hughes. "It provides instant infrastructure when terrestrial communications have been severely damaged. In addition to many of our sites weathering the storm, new units were quickly deployed when and where needed."

Back at Nevada One in Gulfport, Miss., Jeff McGuire, an emergency operations administrator, Health and Human Services, said, "We desperately needed Internet communications for e-mail, and to access and transmit patient records. Hughes deployed a DW satellite dish within 24 hours of our emergency request and provided the vital communications we needed to keep the hospital running." ■



Channel 4 News Flash Digital Edge

As part of Channel 4's NBC news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, Digital Edge host I.J. Hudson interviewed Paul Gaske, executive vice president of the North American division at Hughes.

Gaske said that many government organizations, church groups, civic groups, and banks were now using Hughes services since equipment was installed immediately after the hurricane. "When you have damage like this where you need to restore services, we can be up in a matter of hours as long as you have power. So, with a generator and a small dish system, you have megabits of telecommunications capacity," said Gaske.

Hudson's report concluded that storms like Katrina highlight the advantages of satellite communications technology, especially in hard-to-reach areas. ■