

BGAN FROM STRATOS PROVIDES MANPORTABLE DISASTER COMMUNICATIONS

BY HUGH DONNAN

It is likely that every first responder has been confronted with the need to establish and maintain communication links when local terrestrial or cellular networks are unavailable, insufficient or damaged.

In those situations, satellite systems are often the only reliable solution.

BGAN (Broadband Global Area Network) from Stratos offers first responders small, portable, high-bandwidth terminals that can be rapidly deployed and set up even by non-technical personnel at virtually any location in the world. Offering simultaneous voice and data, as well as IP streaming, BGAN is an ideal solution for accessing applications online or via VPN, sending pictures or videos of a disaster site, and staying connected by telephone with headquarters.

Homeland Security Trusts BGAN

A Kentucky consortium of universities funded by the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security has developed rapidly deployable incident command systems for use in the first critical hours following an emergency. To ensure data and voice communications over the Internet regardless of the situation, each system comes equipped with radio, cellular, and satellite technology – including BGAN from Stratos.

The Information Technology Research Center (iTRC) at the University of Louisville – a member of the Consortium

– received a federal grant to develop rapidly deployable communication systems from commercial off-the-shelf technologies.

“We were selected in the first round of funding for a project we call MITOC (Manportable Interoperable Tactical Operations Center),” said Jim Graham, former iTRC director. “We needed a totally self-sufficient, manportable system that could serve the communication needs of first responders and incident command teams for the first few hours of an emergency – no matter where that might be.”

The MITOC system provides radio interoperability, a wireless network, Internet access, data and voice communications over multiple cellular and satellite networks – including BGAN from Stratos.

“BGAN from Stratos is on every MITOC deployment,” said Graham. “There are plenty of rural areas that still don’t have cell phone service, much less broadband. Wherever cell towers are damaged or inoperable, even in metropolitan areas – such as New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina – BGAN would be invaluable.”

Rural Hazmat Incident Demonstrates BGAN Value

One Hazmat incident highlights the need for first responders to have reliable broadband Internet access in emergencies where other telecommunication options are limited or unavailable.

Mark Garland, a research scientist with Murray State University, is also an officer with a Hazmat Regional Response team. Recently, his team was dispatched to investigate an illegal laboratory in the back of a mobile home.



“We didn’t know what we were dealing with,” Garland said. “My entry team found shelves full of biological and pyrotechnical specimens shipped from somewhere in the Middle East. We were in a trailer park in the middle of nowhere, and the nearest ATF agent was four hours away. The team took photos but, once again, there was no local Internet access, no broadband WiFi or cell phone service. Our radios didn’t even work out there.”

This time, however, Garland was equipped with a portable BGAN unit from Stratos. “I placed the terminal on top of the Hazmat truck, pointed it in the right direction, and got the satellite signal,” he explained. “With BGAN hooked up to my laptop, I emailed photos to the FBI and ATF, who helped us identify these substances. They quickly sent us the right Material Safety Data Sheets. BGAN enabled us to solve the problem and get people back into their homes a whole lot faster.”

MITOC systems are now being commercialized, and every one comes equipped with BGAN from Stratos.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hugh Donnan is Manager, Enterprise Vertical Market, for Stratos. More information on BGAN from Stratos is available at www.thepowerofbgan.com.