



BAYCITY RELEASES DATA FROM CIVIL DEFENCE RESEARCH

Media release, 3 July, 2008, BayCity Communications, Christchurch, New Zealand: Satellite broadband wholesaler BayCity Communications has used the TUANZ Rural Broadband Symposium to release the results of a survey into New Zealand's Civil Defence communications preparedness and underline the importance of having multiple layers of redundancy in our telecommunications planning.

According to the presentation given by BayCity's general manager, Duncan Boennic, New Zealand's Civil Defence managers rate themselves as only moderately prepared for any major disaster.

"On a scale of one to five, with five being completely prepared, the majority of the 17 organisations surveyed rated their level of preparedness as a three or a four," Boennic said. "A few areas considered themselves definitely as a four, while two considered their level of preparedness to be at the bottom of the scale," he said.

"It is understandable that none of the regions were prepared to say they are 100% ready for a disaster, given the unpredictable nature of such events, however we do believe that it is of national importance for not only the Civil Defence organisations, but also businesses to be focused on being prepared for the disruption that would inevitably occur to everyday telecommunication systems, including phone, mobile phone and internet services."

Boennic drew on statistics from the recent earthquake in China which suggest that in the 100,000 km² area that was affected (a little less than the size of the North Island), 3,897 switch centres were destroyed, 28,765km of cable was destroyed and 142,078 telephone poles were flattened.

He says that satellite was heavily drawn on by the authorities to restore communications, including 2300 satellite mobile handsets and 100 IPSTAR terminals for broadband and VOIP, with generator powered comms up and running within 72 hours.

"The prediction is that in the case of a major earthquake or volcanic eruption in New Zealand, both of which have been forecast as being highly likely in the foreseeable future, disruption to telecommunications in the form of broken fibre cables, downed telephone poles and damaged cellphone towers are all inevitable.

"The results of our survey suggest that after landlines and mobile phones, the next layer of redundancy which is heavily relied on New Zealand wide is two way mobile radio.

"Radio is cheap, widely available, and easy to use but does have limits in terms of coverage and only offers a one-dimensional service," Boennic points out.

"Radio does not deliver the kind of communication that can help with the rapid deployment of appropriate services to areas that need it most, for example sending static or video images from disaster sites or being able to tap into online servers to quickly send information to a wide number of emergency services or volunteers."

Boennic says there is a high level of awareness of the value of satellite in emergency situations, but most councils are only equipped with satellite phones and have no other form of satellite connectivity.

"87% of our respondents expressed interest in exploring further the ways that satellite broadband could be used at emergency sites, particularly in conjunction with mobile control centres."

Such mobile control centres are already widely used overseas, including situations like Hurricane Katrina, and the technology is currently available in New Zealand to implement similar solutions.

BayCity Communications believe that funding for local and regional councils for Civil Defence telecoms projects under the new rural broadband funding criteria would be an excellent use of government funds.

"Satellite can deliver broadband diversification to our Civil Defence personnel, powered by generators (less than 1 KW of power required), and with the new iNetVu dishes, we have complete portability."

Made by Canadian company C-Com, the iNetVu dishes are designed to be installed on a range of mobile environments including trucks, vans and trailers. Once installed the dish can be configured to automatically align itself to a predetermined satellite at the press of a button.

Boennic says that the Hutt City Council's Emergency Management Office has already trialled a portable satellite solution, and satellite broadband was also used successfully during the Parahora forest fire in February 2008 and at the Search headquarters during a recent 5 day search and rescue operation at Rimutaka Forest Park.

He suggests that the potential uses of portable broadband technologies have not been fully explored, certainly in the New Zealand context, and that doing so could radically change the way we approach disaster situations.

"There is no reason why the technology cannot be used to deploy expert assistance from around the world, should it be necessary. The Chinese example demonstrates that satellite broadband can be used to provide medical assistance to remote areas using telemedicine, and other uses where having live visuals of the situation can speed up aid will definitely emerge."

"The negative impact of natural disasters is reduced in direct correlation to the speed of response, so being able to set up high quality communications very rapidly will lead to the saving of lives and reducing the loss of property in some situations."

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About BayCity Communications:

BayCity Communications is the National Service Operator for a range of satellite based communication products throughout New Zealand, including broadband internet, Voice over IP and satellite TV.

BayCity Communications has exclusive access to the IPSTAR telecommunications satellite in New Zealand and is contracted to provide New Zealand service providers with a range of wholesale bandwidth. The IPSTAR satellite was launched in 2006 and is the largest two-way communications satellite of its kind.

About C-COM and iNetVu:

Ontario Canada based C-COM Satellite Systems, Inc. is a leader in the development and deployment of mobile satellite-based technology for the delivery of two-way high-speed Internet services into vehicles.

C-COM has developed a unique proprietary mobile self-pointing (iNetVu(tm)) antenna that allows the delivery of high-speed satellite based Internet services into vehicles while stationary, virtually anywhere one can drive.

The iNetVu Mobile uses a standard 12 Volt DC car battery as a power source. It is activated with a simple push of a button or with a click of the mouse, deploys automatically, locks on to the selected satellite in a few minutes and delivers two-way broadband Internet access, VoIP and video services anywhere in the world.

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