

Local emergency responders view latest technology

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Jim Herrin
AAR Mobility Systems

By **KEN GRABOWSKI**
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MANISTEE – The communication technology of today’s world is changing at such a rapid pace that most first responder units can’t keep up with the purchase of the latest equipment, and that can cause many problems at a major incident scene involving groups from several different areas.

All of the first responders being able to communicate in a clear, easy manner can often

make the difference between life and death in a major incident. It used to be a major problem, but this weekend at a Manistee County emergency operations exercise that was held at the Manistee County Road Commission building, local responders had a chance to view the latest technology in this field.

What they were able to view was a Contingency Response Communications System (CRCS) that is produced by AAR Mobility Systems. The demonstration of this exciting new unit fit in well with the DECON tent and emergency communications demos that were held this weekend.

Little River of Ottawa Indians director of public affairs, Glenn Zaring, said it gave the local responders the opportunity to see the very latest technology that is out there for emergency management situations.

“It is basically a demonstration of the type of capability that is out there,” said Zaring. “They (AAR Mobility Systems) have come out with an excellent solution in this whole emergency



Ken Grabowski/News Advocate
COMMAND CENTER: Shown above is AAR Mobility Systems, Jim Herrin, demonstrating the Contingency Response Communication System for local emergency responders that was held over the weekend at the Manistee County Road Commission Garage.

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management area.”

Handling the demonstration for AAR Mobility Systems were vice president of military

sales and manager, C41 business development, Jim Herrin. They gave those attending the exercise an opportunity to view something that will probably be standard equipment in the near future for all emergency incident responders.

“This is already being used in the California, Montana and Texas National Guards,” said Breithaupt. “From an AAR perspective, we try to take good technology that is already out there and proven

to solve a critical communication problems.”

Breithaupt said that something that is especially true in many smaller communities is the fact that they all use different communication and radio equipment. It can become a distinct problem when the two different kinds can't interface and communicate.

“This is a software driving system that can connect up a radio system, and even cell phones into it,” said Breithaupt. “So, fire departments, medical responders, CB users can all talk with each other under this system.”

The Contingency Response Communications System is mobile, so it can go right in the midst of the incident scene. It then has the capability of connecting all these response units, along with sending valuable data and information back to the central command post.

“It allows commanders to see first-hand what is going on at that location, and is really a point of incident system,” said Breithaupt. “It is easy to maintain and operate, but it is mobile so it is easy to move. Unfortunately, most incidents take place where it isn't really accessible, so you can even take this and put it on an aircraft to get it there if you want to.”

The unit also contains cameras and satellite dishes that allow photographs to be sent back to the main command post, so they can follow the situation as it develops.

“A lot of times you don't know what is going on back at the main Emergency Operations Center, and a picture is worth a thousand words,” said Breithaupt. “If you have someone that has vital information, but is on a CB or has a brick (portable radio) in his hand, this allows you to do it.”

Herrin said another key component of the system is its operational simplicity. A per-

son does not have to be an IT expert to operate the system efficiently.

“The whole basis of this system is I can have it running in less than a half hour,” said Herrin. “I basically had this whole system up and running in 12 minutes. You don't have to have an expensive IT tech to run it and most don't have the budgets for that, so they can train a deputy or a 9-1-1 operator to run it.”

However, Herrin said there aren't any two systems that are exactly alike. They are all designed specifically for the need of that particular community.

“We design systems to meet our customers' needs, and it isn't a cookie cutter type of design,” said Breithaupt.

The entire system can fit in the back of a three-quarter ton pickup truck. It also operates by being plugged into a regular power source, or by running off a generator.

Breithaupt said the technology is actually ahead what is currently being used by the military. Both he and Herrin were in the military for over 25 years, and they know the frustration first-hand that comes from communication systems being unable to connect.

“Going into a situation that was always a problem for us as we couldn't talk to an airplane above us or Navy ship,” said Herrin. “What is good about this system is anything new that comes out can easily be adapted to the system.”

However, they pointed out that the cost of the unit might make it more feasible to be purchased on more of a regional basis.

The units presently go for about \$250,000 each, but can be higher or lower depending upon the technology it contains.

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