

Managed Services Case Study

JEFFERSON PARISH LOUISIANA TACKLES HURRICANE GUSTAV

Assessing Damage, Gaining Control, and Coordinating Recovery

CHALLENGE

Approaching Labor Day weekend 2008, Jefferson Parish public safety officials faced the looming threat of yet another hurricane pounding ashore and wiping out roadways, power lines, and vital communications networks.

After Hurricane Gustav strikes, how would they assess damage, share critical needs, and coordinate recovery with responding local, federal, and state agencies?

SOLUTION

Parish leadership activated a CommsFirst Managed Services Plan to access response experts and rapidly deployable, self-sustaining communications solutions.

RESULTS

A CommsFirst deployment team arrives just before Gustav makes landfall. Over the next 96 hours, they quickly establish (and re-establish) multiple ad hoc networks throughout the parish, adapting to the evolving demands of the incident.

Among the hardest hit is Grand Isle, a barrier island approximately 100 miles south of New Orleans. Having no power, water, phones (cellular or land lines), or radio communication, officials there were completely isolated.

With bridges impassable, the parish flies a CommsPack and its operator via helicopter to the island. With its integrated solar power, portable satellite antenna, Wi-Fi router, VoIP and satellite phones, the CommsPack enables:

- Establishment of an incident command post within minutes of arrival
- Rapid damage assessment and data sharing
- Phone calls and Internet access for the mayor, police and fire departments, EMS, city council, local business owners, and others stranded on the island
- Connection with Governor Jindal, Jefferson Parish leadership, Homeland Security, National Guard, and others to coordinate recovery
- Interoperability for P25, 700 MHz, and 800 MHz radios brought to the scene

After the bridges clear, an Operations Vehicle (OP-V) arrives from the Parish 9-1-1 center (after relieving call congestion there), and a second soon follows. Together the OP-Vs provide two secure Wi-Fi hotspots (1-mile radius each), 26 phone lines, streaming video, and radio interoperability for local officials at city hall and disparate responding agencies arriving at the incident command post.

By the time a responding command bus was up and running—an hour after cellular and push-to-talk service came back online late Friday—the parish had been making calls, sharing data, and coordinating their recovery efforts for well over 96 hours.



Highlights

A CommsPack and its operator are airlifted to an isolated barrier island. Within 10 minutes of touching down, the solar-powered backpack delivers:

- Incident communications
- 1200 minutes of voice calls in the first 36 hours
- Radio interoperability
- Secure Wi-Fi
- Rapid damage assessment and data sharing
- Phone access for 4 days while cell and land lines are down

“CommsFirst communications rolled onto the island and the magic happened. Having this capability takes the weight off a chief’s shoulders, knowing critical messages are getting out.”

– Aubrey Chaisson, Grand Isle Fire Chief and Gustav Incident Commander

CommsFirst data and voice services are also used by others responding, such as:

- Fire and police (local and state)
- US Army National Guard
- Army Corps of Engineers
- American Red Cross
- The Salvation Army
- Cellular service providers
- Local businesses



A firefighter makes a call from the CommsPack on the porch of the Grand Isle Fire Department.