

# Colombian Citizens Fight Crime



About 10,000 volunteers in Antioquia are extending the police force's crime-fighting efforts with the help of a new conventional, NXDN-based VHF system.

By R. Michael Brown

Photo courtesy Icom

**T**he country of Colombia is well known for illicit drugs and their manufacturing by drug cartels, insurgent guerrilla groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and crime. According to United Nations Crime Statistics, Colombia had a homicide rate of 53 – 66 murders per 100,000 people per year in the early part of this decade versus 5 – 6 per 100,000 in the United States. Kidnapping in Colombia, which peaked at 3,572 in 2000, was No. 1 in the world.

Those statistics have steadily improved during recent years. How were the country's 91,000 police officers nationwide able to cope with and reduce the rampant crime rate? They couldn't do it alone.

## Political Change

An aggressive anti-drug and anti-crime president, Álvaro Uribe, was

elected in 2002. He started a citizen volunteer force and armed the volunteers with two-way radios to extend the eyes and ears of the police. In 2004, as a strategy of the democratically elected national government, states such as Antioquia, created a Citizens Support Network (CSN) to work as volunteers with the police.

"More than 10,000 volunteers in the Citizen Support Network in Antioquia have increased the number of eyes on the street for the police," says Gus Troconis, Icom sales manager for Latin America. "They are working to help the police minimize crime and the chaos caused by drug dealers and other criminals."

It's working. The most recent homicide rate nationwide is 36 per 100,000 people and has dropped steadily since 2003. In 2009, the kidnapping rate fell to 172. Colombia experienced accelerating economic growth between 2002 and 2007, chiefly because of improve-

ments in domestic security. President Uribe reached his term limit in 2010. Juan Manuel Santos, Uribe's minister of defense, was elected president in August 2010. President Santos is continuing the strategy and planning to expand the CSN to the other 47 states.

## New Tools

Volunteers began using the police analog two-way radio system in Antioquia. But as the force grew, the Antioquia Police Department needed to migrate the volunteers from the existing system with 63 repeaters to an IDAS digital/analog system from Icom. So far, the volunteers have 121 portables and 75 mobiles, and they can still use their analog radios in mixed mode on the new system until they are replaced with new radios. "Last year the CSN started using its own conventional IDAS radio system," Troconis says. "There are 125 municipalities, and 29 now have VHF IDAS



Antioquia Governor Luis Alfredo Ramos officially approves the IDAS project for citizen volunteers to support state police.

repeaters. The goal is to achieve 100 percent digital coverage throughout Antioquia in three years.”

The new mobile radios are used as base stations at the dispatch centers. Volunteers call dispatch on their radios, and a dispatcher uses the existing analog system to deploy police and ambulances. “They have one volunteer in every designated area to help the police,” Troconis says. “Volunteers also patrol in marked vehicles much like the community patrols in the

emergencies. In one incident, a taxicab driver keyed his CSN radio microphone during a kidnapping attempt that was taking place in his cab. He used the radio’s emergency call feature and kept the mic keyed so dispatchers heard the conversation going on in the car. The push-to-talk (PTT) identification function sent the cab driver’s unit ID number to the dispatcher. By identifying the cab and from the ongoing conversation in the back of the cab, dispatchers routed police to rescue the

United States.”

Mobiles are also installed in taxicabs around the cities. Two-way radio calls are made by drivers to the call center so police command officers can dispatch an adequate number of resources to a scene for both

medical and crime victim and driver. The incident resulted in the kidnapper’s apprehension.

“Improving communications technology is helping to make police and public safety more effective and efficient,” Troconis says. “The new radios make things easier and faster. We work very closely with the police department communications staff, and they especially like the IDAS IP link capability between repeaters and encryption functionality of the system. We trained the police on the new system, and the officers train the citizen volunteers.”

The radios are having a positive effect on the streets. In the high-crime capital of Antioquia, Medellin, which is also the headquarters for many drug cartels, citizen volunteers are at work on every block or two, armed with radios. The constant updates and reports from volunteers in the district have resulted in a 20 percent crime rate reduction in that area. The CSN consists of the following key components:

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Source: NXDN Forum

**VHF repeaters.** The repeaters receive both analog and digital mode signals on a single channel. The police in Colombia are introducing digital radios, while still maintaining the existing analog radios in the system. Digital features, integration and convergence with IP technology, and multiple data applications enhance the basic system.

**Mobile radios.** The mobile radios are ideal for public safety and transportation agencies such as taxicabs and delivery service users. The 50-watt VHF transceivers offer advanced multimode operation, improved scanning and flexible installation suitable for

mobile and base stations. There are 75 mobiles in use in Colombia.

### Portable radios.

The portable radios are fast becoming a popular radio with CSN volunteers. The portable is digital/analog multimode capable with a Li-ion battery pack that provides 14-hour operation time, ideal for volunteer use. There are 121 portables in use in Colombia.

IDAS is based on NXDN technology. Kenwood Communications and Icom developed NXDN in a collaborative effort, and now the basic outline of the NXDN specification is completed. Both companies have released initial products based on this spectrum-efficient protocol, and the next stage is to standardize the specification and allow other vendors to provide NXDN-compliant products to the market to make it a true multivendor standard technology.

The strategic alliances with the national government and municipal authorities, public and private partnerships, monitoring services and private security, community action boards and leaders, and CSN supported by a communications system in Antioquia, are becoming a model for other states in the country. The environment in Colombia is still dangerous, but with the help of volunteers in the network, they are directly on the line working with police to defeat crime. ■

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## Midian's Voice Scramblers

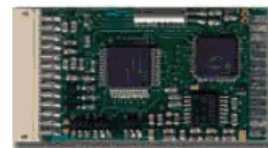
Midian's new VS-1200 is a DSP based FFT Frequency Domain voice scrambler offering a high level of voice security. This technology is comparable in security to rolling code scrambling, but doesn't require synchronization.

This type of encryption and the lack of synchronization result in excellent audio quality, high security and enable the VS-1200 to be used in virtually any type of radio system. These systems include Conventional two-way, HF SSB, Trunking, and Voting.

The VS-1000 (inversion scrambler) and VS-1050 (inversion scrambler with ANI) are also available.

### Benefits of the VS-1200 include:

- 3 user-programmable levels of security
  - No synchronization
  - Programmable gain controls for audio levels
  - ANI in Motorola's MDC-1200, Kenwood's FleetSync, DTMF, 5-Tone & Harris' G-Star
  - Plug-in versions for Icom, Kenwood, Motorola & Vertex
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