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Icom America's Monthly Newsletter

Radios Rescue Dallas Red Cross



from January 2010

In the days following Hurricane Katrina's landfall on the Gulf Coast in August 2005, more than 29,000 evacuees from New Orleans poured into the Dallas-Fort Worth area as people displaced by the flooding and storm damage relocated to the Dallas Convention Center and Reunion Arena for emergency aid services.

The Dallas Chapter of the American Red Cross, which provides disaster relief programs and services throughout its 12-county and 155-city service area in North Texas, headed up efforts to provide emergency and humanitarian services to the Katrina evacuees in Dallas.

Large-scale emergency aid operations typically rely heavily on two-way communications for coordinating efforts, but in the case of the Dallas-based Katrina efforts, the Red Cross' existing communications system proved unfortunately inadequate for its needs.

The Dallas Chapter had been using radios on a system belonging to a local utility service provider that operated its radios in the 900 MHz band. In the fall of 2005, however, the provider sold its radio and utility operations to a European company that wanted to operate the system as a proprietary system only. The Red Cross was left high and dry with its 900 MHz radios and had no place to go. The Dallas Chapter quickly realized the ESMR equipment and cell phones did not meet its needs.

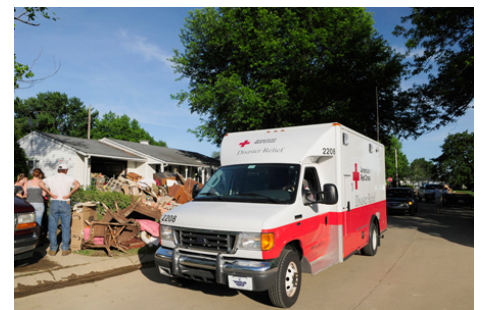
The organization approached Lonnie Danchik, president of Dallas Mobile Communications, a company that operated a 900 MHz LTR system. Although the Red Cross' existing radios

were a different format, the company was able to program them as conventional radios, using them on one of the Dallas Mobile channels.

In 2008, funded by a \$25,000 donation from a private donor, the organization began looking for new radio equipment. Mobile and portable coverage in their area was a specific requirement along with affordability (without sacrificing necessary features).

Danchik told the organization, "Icom makes quality products and has just come out with a new digital line. We have just installed a single UHF Icom IDAS (Icom advanced digital system) channel." He suggested the Red Cross demo a few Icom portables and one mobile on the designated channel for a week. Success.

The Dallas Area Chapter decided to purchase nine Icom F4161DS portables and 11 F6061D mobile radios. Coverage was tremendous; 30-plus miles portable to portable and 60 miles for mobile to mobile.



The organization also appreciated the mobile radio's aluminum case that holds a low-profile power supply and a magnetic antenna, so the radio can quickly be converted into a base station if necessary. Danchik stated, "The nature of the IDAS digital technology allows the base to be operated from inside homes or office buildings, with the antenna setting on a file cabinet or refrigerator."

The portables are inside a smaller metal case for quick distribution in emergencies. They can be charged inside a vehicle with a standard portable antenna or a magnetic antenna on the roof for greater range.

The first major test of the new equipment occurred during the 2009 floods in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, when parts of the area received 8 inches of rain along with 72 mph winds.

The Red Cross set up shelters for people who were forced out of their homes and volunteers provided food, water, and supplies for those in need. When asked how the new Icom equipment performed, the Red Cross responded, "remarkably well."

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