

Carriers struggling to restore service

September 2 2005

Wireless carriers are struggling to restore -- and in some cases, maintain -- networks in the Gulf Coast and New Orleans regions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the most deadly natural disaster in U.S. history, experts tell UPI's Wireless World.

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco at one point yesterday said all communications networks in the state were disabled.

"The severity of Hurricane Katrina has led to significant disruption of all communications services," said Verizon Wireless South Area President Jack Plating. "We will continue to work round-the-clock on our network, and at our stores, to provide support to residents in the effected areas."

Network technicians have been working in the surrounding areas near New Orleans, including Mandeville, Lacombe and Slidell, and wireless coverage has already been restored at the city's international airport. Mobile cellular stations -- called Cell on Wheels -- are being deployed in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Electrical generators were also dispatched to the afflicted areas to power the wireless services.

Satellite telephone carriers are also active in the recovery efforts, including World Communications Center, which has supplied more than 100 satellite phones due to the "communications collapse" in the region, spokesman Tim Taylor told Wireless World. "Satellite phones provide the ideal communication in times of crisis when cell lines -- and land lines -- go down," said Taylor.

Other technology companies are actively involved in the recovery effort as well, shipping IT, networking and wireless telephony equipment to businesses that want to get back online in the afflicted areas as soon as possible.

One supplier of equipment, Canvas Systems, has an "inventory of \$20 million of this equipment," spokeswoman Becky Boyd told Wireless World. "When a disaster strikes, equipment availability and quick delivery are key components of any business recovery strategy."

The company initially provides the technology as a rental but gives the businesses the option to purchase the equipment, which can be configured in under a day.

"Last year Canvas overnighted 21 servers to help out FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) during hurricanes Charley, Frances and Ivan," said Boyd. "The order was received at 8:30 p.m. and the systems delivered the next morning by 10 a.m."

Many companies in the affected areas have so-called disaster-recovery plans in place to help them get back online as soon as possible after a disaster strikes. Verizon itself had such a plan that it used after Sept. 11, 2001, and has been advising clients as to how they can prepare their telecommunications networks "to deal with these kinds of events for the past several years," said Lynette Viviani, a spokeswoman for Verizon Enterprise Solutions Group.

Disaster-recovery packages -- IT and telecom -- have been developed by communications companies during the last several years and are now being marketed as services to businesses, experts said.

Some of the technology used to alleviate telecom needs during an emergency emerged from the oil industry, where it is vital to keep at-sea

drilling operations online at all times.

Communications researchers said that there are applications under development that may be used in future disasters to alleviate the communications network failures. "I have some work that I started before this happened that would have made a significant impact on the communications nightmare that exists right now," Chance Glenn, associate professor of telecommunications and engineering technology and director of the laboratory for advanced communications at the Rochester Institute of Technology, told Wireless World.

Gene J. Koprowski (M.A., The University of Chicago) is a 2005 Lilly Endowment Award Winner for his columns for United Press International. He covers networking and telecommunications for UPI Science News. E-mail: sciencemail@upi.com

Copyright 2005 by United Press International

Citation: Carriers struggling to restore service (2005, September 2) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-09-carriers-struggling.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--