

# SCC VOICE

Thoughts and ideas from The Systems Consulting Consortium

## Sharing Communication Technology Resources for Disaster Recovery

Disaster preparedness and disaster recovery, especially since 2004, loom as a leading global challenge, and the recent past may well be remembered as the decade of sudden disasters. Many are natural — 3.3 million homeless in a Pakistan earthquake; thousands of miles of populous coastline devastated and 200,000 people dead because of an Indian Ocean tsunami; a million people displaced by hurricanes in North America. Other sudden disasters are marked not by scale so much as public fear and anguish — such as terrorist attacks.

In any disaster, the functional casualty that soon rivets public awareness along with news of injury, hunger and exposure, is confusion from the absence of communications. The afflicted may be cut off, evacuation blocked, and aid delayed as rescue falters for want of communications.

The lack of communications is felt immediately, and its continued absence prolongs suffering and loss. Ask anyone who has been through a disaster: “We wondered if anybody knew about us.” “We didn’t know the status or needs of the affected.” “Our rescue plans depended on communications, but there was none.” Memories fade, but the urgency of disaster planning for security and recovery is enduring.

As an investment, disaster planning pays off when continuity prevails, in the avoidance of loss. To make the investment efficient, and provide for the best use of assets, what kinds of models might be available?

Experience suggests that efforts to build shared models for sustaining communications during disaster deserve the highest priority. My company and other entities are working to promote discussion of an underused source of disaster preparedness and recovery — the planned sharing of privately held communications equipment, applications and talent that can enhance the responsiveness of government, relief organizations and business after major disruptions.

New plans are needed for communications resource deployment to prevent and ease emergencies. It is time to look to all owners of communications

resources, be they in the public sector, relief organizations or telecommunications companies. Disaster services that may be required are diverse — police and other first responders, medical facilities, radio and television, government agencies, insurance companies, and others. In every region these will vary according to economic and social models.

When models for shared emergency technology deployment are agreed to, and blueprints for continuity and recovery are pre-defined, what can we predict for disaster recovery in the future? Much larger pools of workers will become free to participate as emergency responders, owing to their use of mobile communications. Volunteers in any sector willing to apply their skills in a disaster will enroll and coalesce as sub-communities of responders marshaled during emergencies by focused broadcast communications guided by joint public-private planning. Identification and location of those volunteers will be accelerated through intelligent routing. A million miles of broadband, wireless and satellite transmission facilities owned or controlled by government organizations and non-communications companies can be tapped as backup in emergencies.

Only government and industry leaders can prioritize communications as a critical resource for continuity and recovery, and develop the shared models for planning and action. Government and technology leaders must convene and collaborate on blueprints for defined technologies deployable by teams of communications experts and volunteers prepared for their roles in a crisis. Business leaders can mandate that their organizations invest time and share what can properly be lent — expertise always, resources often, and a vision that balances the needs of business with the vulnerability of victims.

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