

NorthmarkCommunications

Field Deployable Telecom Solutions

Application Notes: Temporary Disaster Call Center

Situation: You need to take a large volume of citizen calls following a disaster, such as information requests, missing person inquiries, and assistance referrals.

Solution: Create a portable call center including all the supplies and equipment required, packed in easily carried storage containers, ready to go.

When the call center needs to be opened, contact your telephone company's emergency operations center and request the urgent installation of the number of required trunk lines. (Telecommunications Priority Service is essential for this to work.) Place the DTS-PSAP case in a safe central location, connect the line jacks to incoming telephone lines, run extension cables out to each agent position, and begin operating. Optional T10 headset phones may be a better choice for high-volume call taking than the standard ITT2203 speakerphone.

Planning Considerations: Sign up for Telecommunications Priority Service (TPS) to ensure that phone lines can be installed quickly when needed. Alternatively, consider a portable bank of cell phone terminals such as the SX-5.

If a pre-planned safe alternate location is available (such as a damage-resistant school or fire station on high ground), the telephone lines could be installed and made ready for quick activation well in advance of any disaster. (Please note that this can take much longer to accomplish in post-disaster conditions, even with TPS.)

Be sure the phone company sets up the incoming lines in a "hunt group," so that if any line is busy, the call will "roll over" to the next available line.

Any known dedicated telephone numbers should be distributed to those who need to know them well in advance. This is true whether you are using landlines, or satellite/cellular telephone base stations. Include public phone numbers in your public information officer's press-release materials. You can use an existing number and forward calls to the temporary lines when needed.

Pre-program the DTS-PSAP to operate in the Automatic Call Distribution mode. Record generic "disaster mode" greeting and pacifier messages that ask for caller patience due to heavy calling, and that calls will be answered in the order received.

Pre-load and regularly update several laptop computers with essential community information, such as telephone directories, maps, agency staff lists, handicapped citizen databases, and other useful information. Current paper phone books and printed emergency information are also important in the event that a computer fails.

Annually update your data, and drill your staff and volunteers with the system.