

FIRE SERVICE RADIO NEWS

May/June 2014



Do Have a Back-Up Communications Plan?

The Province of Manitoba Emergency Plan warns that *"The modern telecommunications infrastructure used in Manitoba is extremely reliable in day to day use, and is often taken for granted. Nevertheless, this infrastructure can be damaged or otherwise interrupted."* FleetNet radio, cellular phones, internet and traditional landlines often share common transmission lines – like optical fibre and microwave systems. When one of these "pipes" is damaged, or has a major failure, it can affect all technologies that transmit messages through the "pipe", whether they are generated by a FleetNet radio, cell phone, computer or landline phone.

If you question the chances of this ever happening just take a look at these examples from recent years...

In August of 2006 a communications cable was cut just outside Winnipeg resulting in the loss of service to Selkirk, Oakbank and numerous other towns. In the RM of Springfield the fire department assembled a limited response team by knocking on firefighters doors as this was the only way to get in touch with them. The 911 centre had lost communications with emergency medical responders over the entire area.

In June of 2009 a fire at a tower near Notigi Lake caused long distance telephone service and FleetNet service to be unavailable to many northern communities for a full week.

In May of 2011 a fibre optic cable was damaged by a river bank collapse on the Pembina River. Telephone and cellular service was cut-off in several communities including Mariapolis, Snowflake, Swan Lake and Crystal City.

In July of 2011 a fibre optic cable running under the Red River was damaged cutting off communications for Dominion City and surrounding areas.

In October of 2012 a major snow storm led to power outages over a wide swath of Eastern Manitoba. MTS was able to use back-up generators and batteries but even with these there were still intermittent telecommunications interruptions to some towns including Vassar, Marchand and Richer.

In March of 2014 some cables were damaged in Winnipeg resulting in the loss of internet, TV and telephone service to about 1000 residents. Cellular service at one cell site was also affected.

So what kind of alternatives can be put in place to ensure that Fire Departments and Emergency Coordinators have the communications resources they need to respond to and manage a large scale emergency? What kinds of systems will continue to operate even if the MTS "pipes" are overloaded or destroyed?

Satellite Phones: Every Emergency Operations Centre ought to have a satellite phone. A docking station can be set up in your EOC to easily connect standard corded, cordless or DECT phones or integrate to a PBX. If you must evacuate the EOC the satellite phone goes with you. When all else fails the satellite phone is your lifeline to the outside world.

Mobile Repeaters: Take your coverage wherever you need it with a mobile repeater. Installed in a rescue vehicle or designed to be portable, this approach is useful for allowing portable radios to be used over a wider area and can also allow fire ground communications to be sent back to a base station at a distance.

Win a \$7500 Lighting Package at the MAFC Conference!



Alcom has partnered with Pro Upfitters and Sea Hawk Specialized Truck Service to give you a chance to win a Fire Chief's Vehicle Package.

Attend the annual MAFC Conference in Dauphin on June 5th and 6th you will have a chance to win. The package includes complete vehicle lighting, controller, siren, Motorola VHF radio and complete installation.



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Lots to Learn at 3D Firefighting Seminar in Winkler

At this year's Winkler Fire Conference, held April 25th and 26th, Ed Hartin of Compartment Fire Behavior Training presented a seminar on 3D Firefighting – tactics for taking control of fire conditions inside structures while evaluating risk at the earliest opportunity.

Hartin is the Fire Chief with Central Whidbey Island Fire & Rescue in Washington and has 39 years of fire service and training experience. Hartin explained the techniques and tactics used to safely gain access to a fire compartment or structure, advance in safely, and mount an effective attack on the fire.

Kevin Wittmeier, Alcom's Public Safety Communications Consultant, attended the seminar. For Kevin it was a great opportunity to learn about the hazards firefighters face and some of the techniques used to minimize the hazards when attacking structure fires. The highlight was watching the practical live fire training held at the training grounds in Winkler and seeing the knowledge that was shared in the seminar being put into practical use.

Alcom is pleased to be a sponsor of the annual Winkler Fire Conference.



Ed Harton, Chief Instructor - CFBT-US



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