Citel. The VoIP Migration Company™

Florida Department of Health improves disaster recovery phone system with Portico™ TVA™

Florida is a state that, perhaps more than most, needs to be prepared for emergencies. Both natural and man-made disasters must be planned for, ranging from floods and hurricanes to possible incidents involving hazardous materials or nuclear power.

One particularly vital area that must function effectively in an emergency is the state's telephone systems. The Florida Department of Health, Division of IT currently has seven enclosed Mobile Communication Units (MCU) that provide Department of Health (DOH) network connectivity. These enclosed custom utility trailers are equipped with a high-speed satellite providing 2Mb down and 1Mb upstream data speed, self generated power, rooftop air conditioner, and the necessary infrastructure hardware to provide DOH network connectivity. The units can also provide connectivity directly to the internet (isolated from the DOH network), DOH phone and fax over satellite via onboard PBX, and MED82 radio service through handheld radios, mobile repeaters and Radio over IP equipment.

Positioned throughout the state, the MCUs can be deployed immediately in all disaster response efforts where data and voice communications are vital. They cover more than 18,000 employees spread across 67 counties with a number of different telephone systems deployed.

New Challenges Require New Solutions

The MCU phone system was designed and built on open source software, providing the Florida DOH with maximum flexibility. However, the DOH's ability to restore communications infrastructure to devastated offices quickly was complicated by the variety of PBXs in use across the state.

With many different PBXs, it was not possible for the MCUs to carry all of the necessary equipment to cope with infrastructure damage. The DOH needed a way to restore communications using their Asterisk-based IP disaster recovery telephony system, using the handsets that were already on site during emergencies whenever available.

Connecting Handsets

To overcome the issue of multiple PBXs, the DOH turned to the Portico™ TVA™ from Citel. By adding the TVA to its disaster recovery plans, the MCUs are able to connect many of the locally based conventional phone handsets to the Portico™ TVA™. The TVA then connects to the

Asterisk-based IP PBX within the MCU to link up to 24 users per TVA to the phone network.

The TVA solution means that the DOH can easily connect non-VoIP handsets to its IP telephony systems, so that readily available handsets can be pressed into service to provide telephony in an emergency.

The TVA units are easy to set up and administer. The ease with which they are configured allows technicians without extensive VoIP experience to feel comfortable with the process.

The DOH has even used a Portico™ TVA™ to supply telephony service to a separate building away from the one housing the VoIP server, by beaming the calls from building to building using a point-to-point parabolic dish setup. This solution enabled the team to provide phones and data to a vacant building in just two days, whereby connecting the system through standard methods would have taken a month.

About Citel Technologies, Inc.

Citel enables SMBs, large enterprises and service providers to realize the cost and productivity benefits of IP telephony while at the same time leveraging their existing PBX infrastructure. Businesses with single or distributed locations and PBX vendors can now deploy next-generation IP applications and services at their own pace, with minimal business disruption. Service providers can deploy Hosted IP telephony services quickly, without having to "rip and replace" existing enterprise PBX handsets and LAN cabling. Citel now offers its own IP PBX and, in cases where rip and replace is applicable Citel now offers its own IP Telephones. Citel is based in Amherst, New York with offices in Loughborough, England (UK) and Toronto, Canada.