



# Sulphur Fire Department

OFFICE OF THE FIRE CHIEF  
DANNY J DUPRE

P.O. BOX 1309  
SULPHUR, LA 70664-1309  
TEL# 337-527-4545 FAX# 337-527-2427

october 21, 2005

Chairman Kevin Martin  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

As a captain with the Sulphur Fire Department in Louisiana, I can attest first-hand to the power of Iridium's mobile satellite communications service in a large scale disaster. Sulphur, a paid professional fire dept, is located in South West Louisiana and was one of many fire departments that responded to the scene in New Orleans. The day after Katrina hit, we sent in 19 men, 2 supply trailers, and 7 boats. As we prepared to deploy, Blue Sky Network, an Iridium service provider, recommended we mount a D1000 tracking and messaging unit on one of our trucks. The D1000 unit utilized the Iridium network for tracking and email capabilities with planners and organizers of our response.

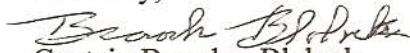
The Iridium-based unit enabled us to be in constant contact with our department over 200 miles away while standing in 12" of water at the scene. And to exploit the service our responders were able to communicate with their families as well. To appreciate this, you have to understand that even the New Orleans Police Department couldn't communicate with themselves a block away yet we were never without contact even though we were on the other side of the state.

After the incident, we were able to use our recorded route in conjunction with Google's Maps to facilitate our post incident analysis. With this information, we were able to see, down to house level, when and where the rescues took place. It was inadvertent that we had this equipment in the first place, so procedures to use it were never established. In effect we over communicated a number of things that ended up causing issues back home. It was a real contrast to the significant lack of communications during the event that is so widely publicized. The notable fact was that this technology exists and is available but not in place to function in a theatre where it would be so appropriate.

There were a number of factors to why things went so bad in New Orleans but communications can be one that could be easily addressed with only a few key initiatives in emergency service methods. The frustrating factor is that we had a totally reliable system that enabled our small deployment to be as effective as we were. But the main agencies in place to coordinate the total response effort had little or no method to deliver instructions to the majority of responding deployments. Thousands of responders could have been as effective in their efforts as we were and that would have changed the tide of the entire response.

This system can be adapted to suit the needs of fire, police, and ems. It is the logical and responsible path to take given what this nation has seen. It will not fix the shortcomings of the decision makers and disaster planners but can remove the case for argument with regards to communications. Also Iridium can give those in the field the tools they need to do what they do.

Sincerely,



Captain Brandon Blalock  
Sulphur, Louisiana Fire Department