

The availability of reliable means of communications during an emergency and disaster situation is necessary to cater for the relief operations. In the event of any disaster and emergency situation, the terrestrial telecommunications infrastructure as well as power infrastructure also get impacted thereby access to communication means that are not dependent on the terrestrial telecommunications and power infrastructure is essential to support the relief activities.

The communication requirements during disaster and emergency situations are very ably supported by satellite based solutions. The satellite network infrastructure in most of the cases does not get impacted by the events related to disasters. Moreover, the power requirements for the satellite based solutions could be met by solar energy with ease. Furthermore, any satellite network normally will have a very large coverage and thus services are provided everywhere without restriction.

Additionally, there is also a need during the disaster and emergency situations to provide a communication solution and mean that is easy to use and operate with minimum or no training. The operator and user of such communication solution should be familiar with using similar devices in his normal life.

One of the available satellite communication solutions are the mobile handheld satellite terminals. The mobile satellite communication can support activities associated with ALERTING the general populace of the emergency and disaster event and RELIEF by establishing immediately a communication link for activities related organizing and coordination of relief operations and exchange of information.

The mobile handheld satellite terminals are supported by existing Geostationary Orbit (GSO) satellites and Non-Geostationary Orbit (NGSO) satellites in the Mobile Satellite Service (MSS) category. These terminals support nearly all the services and features available in the existing terrestrial cellular terminals including voice, fax, SMS, low and high data connectivity, position location, etc.

In addition, the Thuraya handheld terminals have built-in GPS receiver that is a very useful application during disaster and emergency situations in order to support aid and relief activities.

Thuraya also supports broadband service requirements through its ThurayaDSL terminal that offers a speed up to 144 kbps on a shared channel. The terminal, which is SIM card operated, needs to be connected via Ethernet to a notebook or a computer for a normal Internet/data usage.

All the Thuraya terminals are supported by solar chargers which come in different sizes.

In 2006, The International Telecommunication Union and Thuraya Satellite Telecommunications Company have entered into an agreement to provide handheld satellite terminals to assist countries in disaster mitigation and relief operations. Thuraya contributed handheld satellite terminals along with solar chargers.

In recent times, ITU has deployed Thuraya hand-held satellite phones to help in restoring communication links and facilitating relief efforts in the disaster affected areas in Uganda and Bangladesh. In the past, Thuraya phones were also deployed during the Tsunami event in Maldives, Sri Lanka, etc as well as during the earthquakes in South Asia and Iran.

Focus Areas:

- Improve cross border circulation of terminals / products that are used for emergency and disaster activities and administrations to implement effective mechanisms to improve the situation;
- Harmonization of rules and regulations concerning cross border circulation of terminals / products;
- Ratification and implementation of Tampere Convention and thereby reducing and waiving off the regulatory hurdles faced by humanitarian agencies in particular for cross border circulation of equipment used during such events;
- Identification of additional frequency bands for Public Protection and Disaster Relief (PPDR);
- Enhanced cooperation among all stakeholders at the international, regional and national level;