

# Rapid communication during an emergency

**Philippe Meleard** discusses REVERSE 911, the computerised technology that can potentially save thousands of lives



**W**ILDFIRES THAT RAVAGED AREAS of Southern California just over a year ago sparked evacuations on a massive scale. The fires were a repeat of the conflagration four years earlier in which 22 people perished.

This time, however, there was a significant difference: one person died as a direct result of the fire.

The authorities in San Diego County attribute this fact largely to the mandatory evacuation notice that went out to telephones in thousands of homes. This allowed entire communities to be alerted simultaneously. Altogether, 600,000 people were safely moved from their homes.

The computerised technology which made this happen is called REVERSE 911, now part of the EADS Professional Mobile Radio (PMR) business extending into Europe, the United States and other key regions.

PMR and emergency response solutions are a major focus of development for EADS Defence and Security, and an important part of the company's diversification into new, civil emergency applications for its products.

Originally developed for public safety organisations and emergency management groups, REVERSE 911 has grown to include many different types of organisation for a wide variety of circumstances.

It offers patented interactive technology that enables users to send recorded messages rapidly and simultaneously to thousands of people. Users can pinpoint precisely who receives the communication based on call data, geographic areas, or lists created around specific criteria. REVERSE 911 is always available, and backed by 24/7 emergency support services. Messages can also be recorded in multiple languages to serve multilingual needs.

The system – it takes its name from the North American 911 emergency dial code – is making a huge contribution towards dealing effectively with civil emergency situations. In the instance of the Southern California wildfires, civic officials in San



*In 2003, 22 people died in Southern California wildfires*

Rogério Oliveira

Diego acknowledged it as 'a real life-saver – very effective in getting the word out.'

CBS put it in stronger terms: "REVERSE 911 is the reason so many thousands of Southern Californians were able to quickly evacuate their homes."

This is probably one of the best examples of how the system has become integrated into civil emergency procedures in North America, and illustrative of how it can be deployed in many other regions of the world.

The system has been used in many other crisis situations: In times of

severe flooding; bomb scares; natural disasters; leaks of hazardous materials; and pollution of water supplies.

Police and law enforcement agencies use it to alert communities about escaped prisoners, sexual offenders, missing persons, burglars and other criminal activity.

## COMMUNITY MATTERS

The system could also be invaluable in enhancing public awareness, and improving relations between police and the community in matters such as crime prevention alerts and credit card frauds.

In the wake of the Virginia Tech University shootings in April 2007 (see page 51), a REVERSE 911 system has been installed, providing free, instant email, text and voice messaging to all individuals in the interactive community notification network.

On a smaller scale, when floodwaters threatened Lake County, Ohio, a REVERSE 911 call to 199 residents along the Chagrin River warned them to move their vehicles to higher ground.

EADS DS sees a host of other uses for the system, spanning utilities, transportation, manufacturing industries, military and homeland defence operations.

In healthcare, another example, the notification system can be used for emergencies surrounding public health matters, product recall and so on.

REVERSE 911 is in the growing EADS portfolio of leading-edge technology solutions that positions the company as a prime contractor capable of delivering reliable communication during times of crisis. CRJ

■ [www.eadsuk.com](http://www.eadsuk.com)

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