Rescue crews get a boost

In Ireland, the Boyne Fishermen's Rescue and Recovery Service has seen a significant improvement in its performance after it replaced its old paging system with one from Swissphone

L-R: Jason Clarke, Mark Quinn, and Eugene Brannigan

Established during the 1970s to serve a fishing community centred on the Irish East coast town of Drogheda, the 30 volunteers of the Boyne Fishermen's Rescue and Recovery Service today rally to incidents not only along the River Boyne and its estuary but on inshore waters for some miles along the coast.

Funded wholly by donations, the service is at the ready around the clock, 365 days a year. It operates a capable fleet of rescue boats and vehicles. And it maintains a specialist diving team, which can perform underwater recoveries anywhere in the 32 counties of Ireland.

Callouts range from the most serious of incidents to cases such as a pleasure boat whose engine has failed or a car stranded in treacherously soft sand after taking a moonlit pleasure drive.

'Massive improvement'
Recently the service has seen a significant boost in its performance after replacing its old and increasingly unreliable radio paging system with a modern one by Swissphone, which has been trimming minutes off its response times. "There is a massive improvement," says Jason Clarke, who manages the system. In the past, he explains, patchy radio coverage meant that each callout had to be transmitted several times to ensure that everyone received it. "Definitely there's minutes

saved by only having to set them off once," says Clarke.

One particular weak spot was not far from the boathouse, in a part of the town where several of the responders live. "They could be sitting at home and they weren't getting the pages with the old system," says Clarke. "The new system gets to them, and that means the boat is now getting out much quicker on to the water."

Like the old system, the new equipment provides voice paging, delivering a brief spoken message to each pager the recipient can replay as required. Much of the improvement in performance with the new system is due to a change from UHF to VHF radio, which gives a longer reach. In addition, the Swissphone equipment offers selective calling to reach specific groups or individuals. Also, since the service has no central control room, it helps that the system can be operated from any telephone.

Simple to use
To send a call, Clarke simply dials into the system – usually from his mobile phone – and enters first a security code (a precaution against false alerts). Then he keys the number of the individual or task group he wants to contact. "I have a list of all the pagers," he says. "So I could type in 101 and then I would wait about

six seconds and then I can talk. If I want the whole team, I can type in 999."

"It's simple to use and robust; it's why we recommended the Swissphone solution to the customer," adds Mark Quinn, managing director of EMR Integrated Solutions, the radio communications company that supplied the system. "Rescuers must have complete confidence in the system as they need high-performance communications to the emergency services and their colleagues that won't let them down."

Future-proof
But the Swissphone s.QUAD Voice pagers used by the Boyne crews have capabilities that go well beyond their present needs. For example, they can also receive digital pages and display text messages. Also, they can use Bluetooth for linking to a smartphone which serves as a gateway to communicate the user's availability before an alert and to reply to a message. "What they wanted to start off with was just to replace the system that they had," explains Quinn. "If they want any additional functionality down the road, then we can give that to them – on demand."

New Voice POCSAG solution
Swissphone's new onsite voice POCSAG transmitter allows the dispatch of voice and text messages at the same time – for applications that require both types of messages, such as in industry or healthcare, or for migrating to digital while keeping old analogue pagers in operation.