

TANDBERG SOLUTION SPOTLIGHT

SEEING AND HEARING FACE-TO-FACE FOR ASSESSMENT, COMMAND AND DEPLOYMENT: TANDBERG Visual Communication Proves Critical in Strong Angel III Disaster-Response Exercise

Strong Angel III



In a large-scale disaster, every person is a first responder. The tools to coordinate a cohesive response must be easy to use, reliable and allow quick assessments of the situation at hand. Face-to-face communication is essential, but problematic across large distances and when traditional communication infrastructure has failed.

It is under these circumstances that the reliability, mobility and interoperability of TANDBERG's videoconferencing systems have proven to be a strong asset. The Strong Angel III disaster recovery exercise demonstrates how critical face-to-face communication is for effective response.

THE SITUATION

The situation was grim as a pandemic virus, coupled with a wave of cyber-attacks, spread across the globe. It isolated U.S. cities from Federal assistance and knocked out power, Internet access and even cell phone communications. Emergency services scrambled to assess the situation and quickly began to respond and recover. In the effort to create organization out of chaos, having a reliable, easy-to-establish way for even non-technical persons to communicate with each other — clearly, quickly, and with greater impact — proved to be essential.

This was the scenario behind Strong Angel III, the third in a series of disaster-recovery demonstrations that first began in 2000. The primary goals of the week-long effort were to field-test and demonstrate effective means of delivering life-saving humanitarian relief in the wake of natural and man-made disasters.

The exercise was designed to foster collaboration between aid agencies, governments and military in providing disaster relief, supply local communities with solutions that help them cope with disaster and enable military forces to better prepare for and execute humanitarian relief efforts. In addition, the exercise was set up to test technologies that facilitate faster assessment and recovery efforts.

"In the wake of major incidents like the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami in Southeast Asia, it is more important than ever to have an integrated response when disaster strikes," says Eric Rasmussen, M.D., director of Strong Angel III and professor at San Diego State University. More than 40 disaster-related tasks were planned for the 7-day demonstration. Tasks were designed to test the speed of deployment, ease of use in a real life scenario and interoperability of communication technologies for voice, video and data over a combination of networks, including wireless, satellite and low bandwidth terrestrial connections.

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STRONG ANGEL III USES TANDBERG FOR:

- Face-to-face collaboration without the risk of contamination
- Real-time assessment of patients by remote medical and disease control experts
- Delivering status reports about resources such as food and water to remote field offices
- Communicating the government's response to the community effectively

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

In any recovery effort, assessment is the first priority. You need to have access to the people at the scene as well as in the command centers in order to assess every piece of information available. Collaboration is key. As part of the response and recovery scenario, TANDBERG's videoconferencing systems instantly linked key participants, including government agencies, private companies and universities. TANDBERG gave decision-makers and emergency response teams an easy, reliable way to meet face-to-face when choices needed to be made and actions taken.

As disaster struck and traditional communication networks were out of service, TANDBERG mobile video solutions were able to keep participants fully connected using satellite and Evolution-Data Optimized (EVDO), a wireless broadband standard. "The ability to talk face-to-face with an incident commander or other team member during a crisis is a very valuable addition to anyone's communication arsenal," noted Allen Johnston, Director of Business Development at Thunderworks Mobile Engineering, one of the participating manufacturers in the exercise that handles satellite projects in the public-safety arena.

TANDBERG's visual communication solution helped meet the goals of the exercise in a number of ways, including:

- Enabling multiple teams to collaborate face-to-face on the scope of the disaster without the risk of contamination from in-person contact.
- Allowing real-time assessment of patients by medical and disease control experts.
- Providing public information officials with a way to deliver status reports about the pandemic's effect on resources such as food and water to remote field offices for a more effective, coordinated response. They could also stream reports via the TANDBERG Content Server to keep additional offices or the public informed.
- Keeping the local community up to date about the government's response to the pandemic, and sharing essential information with non-English speaking communities.

Ease of use was essential to helping participants meet these goals. Even the least technically savvy users were able to set up the TANDBERG systems easily. "There were people who had never worked with a system like this before, who were using the equipment on site," says Scott Feinberg, Public Safety Market Development Manager, TANDBERG. "We demonstrated the systems just once, and they were able to assemble them and put them to use in the field in a matter of minutes. There was no learning curve."

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**DR. ERIC FROST, CO-DIRECTOR OF THE
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Creating a social network proved to be a vital first step for rapid response. As people connected visually on a richer, more personal basis, collaboration was faster and more effective, even though essential specialists — including doctors, experts from agencies such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other government officials — were widely dispersed.

In addition, a central benefit of TANDBERG’s visual communication solution was the ability to coordinate a global network by bringing experts and officials from around the world together to discuss the situation in real-time, while minimizing the spread of disease across borders.

“Part of how you build the social network is by talking to people... interacting with them, both verbally and visually.” said Eric Frost, co-director of the Homeland Security Masters Program at San Diego State University and Regional Coordinator of Storm Angel III. “You get to know them as people, and can work with them more effectively. With a visual communication system, you’re building a social network by actually communicating with people far away in a real-time, face-to-face way, just as you do every day with the people around you. You’re not just sending words back and forth. You’re connecting.”

THE RESULTS

At the end of the exercise, the Strong Angel III evaluation committee concluded that the interoperability of TANDBERG’s standards-based videoconferencing systems with other technologies was essential to meet the critical requirement for disaster response. Despite the adverse conditions, TANDBERG enabled effective communication and fast decision-making, allowing first responders to assess the situation and act accordingly.

Strong Angel III showed that face-to-face interaction is a key component of successful disaster-response programs, providing emotional support, definitive information and accelerated decision-making — all critical elements for saving lives and reducing damage during disasters.