

West Yorkshire Police, UK

Major resource planning and officer safety benefits

Background

West Yorkshire Police (WYP), the sixth largest force in the UK, has equipped each of its 5,300 officers and over 2,000 support staff with a GPS-enabled TETRA handportable.

The use of such a handportable means that the accurate location of each officer is available to controllers at the force's Integrated Command and Control System (ICCS). ICCS is an integrated system of emergency response and communications technologies which allows police officers to quickly, safely, and efficiently disseminate critical information when responding to incidents.

The territory covered by the WYP includes five major cities and a population of 2.1 million people. The force deals with an average of 890 crimes and 1750 incidents per day, including 440 classified as 'immediate response required'. The new system will offer major improvements in resource planning and deployment, together with improved officer safety.

Superintendent Mark Bennett, WYP's Airwave Director, said that selecting a handportable with built-in GPS was an easy decision.

"We had already decided to equip the force with new TETRA terminals as part of the UK's Airwave emergency services radio system. Given the advanced features of the new Sepura terminals, and that they would be in use for the next five or ten years, it made obvious sense to incorporate a GPS capability which would provide significant resource planning and safety benefits."

Requirements Solutions Results

The system enables each officer to use the handportable's emergency button to instantly transmit their exact location to the ICCS. Alternatively, the controller can remotely determine officers' locations by automatically interrogating their handportables. The WYP plan is for the ICCS controller to assign different priority levels to each officer's handportable according to the situation at hand. For example, if an officer is attending an incident or even in an emergency, the handportable can transmit their position every few seconds; if the officer is on a regular patrol then the update can be less frequent. This way, officer safety is enhanced and the control room can focus more on high priority activities.

Mark Bennett sees many benefits for the adopted system: "Without GPS, the controllers need to remember which officer is doing what and where they are, and human nature means that officers sometimes forget to report this information. With the GPS-equipped system, the controller no longer needs to ask if any units are available to attend a particular incident, thereby giving them greater control and improved resource deployment capability."

The GPS system radically improves officer safety and protection when the emergency button is used; for instance if an officer cannot speak, by pressing such button he is able to automatically give his or her location to the control room.

Currently, if an officer presses the emergency button on their radio, the controller can only react to the situation using their last known location. Support units may subsequently arrive, only to find that the officer has moved. The use of the GPS handportable means that the position of each officer is known at all times.

Furthermore, because this information is recorded and logged, it offers an analysis facility after an incident. After evaluating other TETRA handportables, WYP settled on Sepura's SRP2000 sGPS handportable which offers full TETRA communication capabilities and which, even though it is GPS-enabled, at just 200 grams is still the lightest handportable on the market. QinetiQ, Europe's largest science and technology group, provide the GPS module built into Sepura's SRP2000 sGPS handportable. This module, exclusive to Sepura in TETRA, decodes the GPS signals, enabling the exact location of the police officer to be established and transmitted back to the WYP Control Centre.

From a technical standpoint, the handportable uses advanced parallel processing to increase GPS receiver sensitivity by a factor of 1,000 compared to standard GPS, enabling considerably more accurate and reliable location fixing, even in dense urban environments and within some buildings. Thus, officer resources and officer safety can be safeguarded in all arenas of modern policing.

A final word from Mark Bennett, "The use of this handportable means we can move towards control by the force and not by the officer. Furthermore, in some instances we may be able to move towards single crewing. This will allow us to make our existing resources spread much further".

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