



RESCUE:UPX-2

Escambia County Emergency Operations Center gets more control over crises



The Escambia County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Florida is used as a central command station to manage and respond to major events such as hurricanes. Many life safety and security agencies must collaborate from this command and control center, including fire, police, EMS, and various public services.

Historically, information was displayed on three overhead projectors, a pull-down screen, and four cable TV monitors. Flip charts were often used to present data and develop plans. The Escambia County EOC was limited in the number of sources and method of displaying data. The AV components and computer systems operated independently; the equipment was not integrated and there was no centralized method of control.

The new state-of-the-art system, which was designed by Walthall & Associates and



programmed and installed by The Whitlock Group, enables the EOC to view many more sources of information, control the sources, and disseminate more information to the various agencies faster and easier, which is imperative during a major emergencies like a hurricane. "We can monitor weather radar and evacuation traffic, and view PowerPoint presentations about shelter status and roadway traffic at the same time," states Janice Kilgore, Director of Public Safety. "We can really focus on the situation as it's developing and react more efficiently rather than taking time to gather information and move to where we can view it."

Viewing maps is particularly vital and, prior to the UPX-2, very frustrating. Many of the map files were too large, the resolution was too high, or the signal format wasn't compatible with the display devices. Escambia County officials were forced to make overhead transparencies of affected areas. By the time emergency officials looked at a slide or trans-

parency of the mapped area, the information could be obsolete. Kilgore explains, "When dealing with a chemical hazard, for example, if the wind shifts then everything changes." The UPX-2 resolves this issue, accepting 1600 x 1200 resolution signals and allowing presenters to annotate over any computer or video signal. "The enhanced features such as annotating in real-time and viewing high-resolution dynamic maps are a vast improvement."

The EOC is also challenged by very limited space. The new integrated solution consolidates systems and enhances presentation capabilities. David Ebbert of Walthall & Associates specified the UPX-2 as a complete, integrated solution for presentation and control. UPX-2 is used to control all the AV equipment and lighting in the EOC. Two TPS-6000's were used in other rooms to control ancillary systems. Keith Kavanaugh of The Whitlock Group recalls, "UPX-2 was easy to install, and Crestron technical support was terrific while we were onsite."

This was Whitlock's first experience with the UPX-2, and they liked it so much that Whitlock is now using UPX-2 on several other installations. For Whitlock, UPX-2 is a great alternative to SmartBoard and SmartBoard's Symposium. "UPX-2 can accept RGB video and 1600 x 1200 high-resolution computer signals and annotate over any signal. Smart needs to convert video to computer and is limited to 1280 x 1024 resolution," notes Kavanaugh. "Many customers, and the Escambia EOC specifically, need to pull-in high-resolution feeds and they want to annotate over them. UPX-2 solves some of the Smart issues."

Officials at the Escambia County EOC were very excited about UPX-2. "When [Whitlock] showed them how to annotate over high-resolution computer signals, preview various video and computer sources, and select a feed for program for everyone to see, their reaction was 'Oh, Wow!'" Kavanaugh recounts.

"Emergency situations are very stressful," says Kilgore. "Not having to think about what information is available in which format and how we are going to display it makes things much easier." The nature of the EOC is collaborative and the UPX-2 allows officials to preview computer and broadcast feeds, select one, and then annotate over a high-resolution signal — all from one panel. Kavanaugh agrees, advising, "The key is the collaborative element: they pull-up an image, show it, and then share thoughts and ideas." ■

