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Communications at Emergency Incident Sites: Assigning Cellular Telephones to Specific Positions or Functions

SUMMARY

When distributing cellular telephones at incident sites, agencies should assign telephones to specific positions or functions so they can be passed along by each officer performing such duties. Assigning phones will help avoid the need to generate new telephone directories when shifts or personnel change.

DESCRIPTION

Cellular communications at the Pentagon were unreliable or inaccessible during the initial hours after the September 11 attack. Technicians remedied this problem by installing portable cellular towers onsite, significantly increasing cellular telephone access.

The Defense Protection Services (DPS) distributed cellular phones to its on-duty personnel and provided the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with a directory of corresponding phone numbers to facilitate evidence recovery. The DPS issued new cellular phones to its in-coming staff at shift changeover, forcing the DPS to generate and distribute a second telephone directory with updated numbers for each DPS position.

The need for multiple directories could have been circumvented had incumbent officers surrendered telephones to their replacements. The Arlington County After-Action Report suggests that agencies assign cellular telephones to positions or functions, not persons, during an emergency response. Telephone numbers would then correspond to officers performing a certain duty or incident command system function rather than specific individuals who are likely to change during a prolonged incident response.

CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Arlington County After-Action Report on the Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attack on the Pentagon*. May 30, 2002.
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