

# The Source

ADVISORY RADIO NEWSLETTER  
Spring 2003

## Gallatin County deploys Portable Advisory Radio Stations to keep citizens informed during flood emergency.

Snowmelt run-off from a dramatic jump in temperature triggered flash floods across the Gallatin River Valley this Spring, washing out numerous dirt roads and bridges common to the area. Citizens suddenly found pathways to homes, businesses and recreation areas impassable due to mud slides and trapped, deep, standing water. It was so bad, in fact, that in March 2003 county officials had to declare a state of emergency.

This case study imparts why the County decided to add Portable Advisory AM Radio Stations to its extensive emergency communications arsenal.



**Emergency Manager Jason Shrauger with One of the County's Three Portable Advisory Radio Stations**

Gallatin County, Montana, lies right at the heart of the Rocky Mountains at the northern-most tip of Yellowstone National Park. Unusually large, the County covers more than 2,500 square miles and boasts being "the most populated and fastest growing county in scenic southwest Montana." It's pretty easy to understand why. Snow-capped mountains, clear streams, national parks and preserves cover this stunning rural wilderness setting, drawing over 100,000 people (locals and tourists) on any given day.

Emergency manager Jason Shrauger of the [Gallatin County/City of Bozeman OEM](#) takes this responsibility seriously. To ensure his vast domain is covered, he recently added three new RoadRunnR Portable Advisory Radio Systems to Gallatin County's emergency program. Each fire-engine red RoadRunnR unit is set up with two frequencies (1600 and 1700 kHz) and automatic, targeted NOAA EAS/weather radio programming. This means that when Gallatin or adjacent Madison County receive NOAA alerts for their areas, RoadRunnR Portable Advisory Stations automatically transmit the broadcasts to AM radio receivers in a three-to-five-mile radius. That's 28 to 78 square miles. These radio trailers are the first in the nation to carry NOAA Specific Area Message Encoding that targets broadcasts geographically.

In contrast to the fixed Emergency AM Advisory Radio Stations that cities and towns usually employ, Portable Emergency Stations are often the communication tool of choice for larger jurisdictions (such as counties, states and the military), because Portable Stations can be quickly deployed to affected areas during highway incidents, evacuations, *etc.* For example, Palm Beach County in Florida has used RoadRunnRs to assist with hurricane emergencies for years; the State of South Dakota uses RoadRunnR for fire evacuations; Umatilla Army Depot in Washington deploys them in relation to chemical weapons destruction projects. Shrauger plans to use Gallatin's RoadRunnRs primarily for weather-related events and forest fires. See why, below, in his words:

### **What problem were you trying to solve and what do you see as the overall result?**

Shrauger: "We had severe flooding in several areas within the County over a series of several days. The task at hand was to notify as many of the customers in those areas of road closures, damaged roads and basic water safety reminders. We did this using local print, TV and radio media as well as our web page, recorded message line, and the HARPS [Highway Advisory Radio Portable System]. Overall, we were successful in this event."

### **How were the emergency stations positioned with respect to the flooding and to each other?**

Shrauger: "They were placed in the immediate area of the road closures or bridge outages to be used to notify the public of alternate routes;..."



### **What were they telling listeners to do?**

Shrauger: "They were telling listeners to use alternate routes, use caution when traveling a list of specific roads, other sources of info on the floods (web page, recorded info line, etc.) and also had some specific safety information (don't drive through water etc...)."

### **Were both frequencies used and, if so, why?**

Shrauger: "Both frequencies were used, because we had two separate areas affected with a need to put different info up for each location. The locations were too close to each other to put both on the same frequency due to overlap."

### **How will the system be used in the future, and how is the public made aware of the station?**

Shrauger: "These radios have been used to mitigate the damages to roads during flooding events, used to get NOAA messages to point-specific locations that normally did not receive NOAA broadcasts and will be used in the future for evacuations, road closures, specific emergent and non-emergent events to help us keep in contact with our customers. We have several tools available to us for notifying the general public, EAS, emergency email, web sites, recorded phone messages, door to door, local print, voice, and television media just to name a few. These three Portable Advisory Radio Stations give us the opportunity to pre-position another tool for use whenever the time arises."

### **How was funding for the system arranged?**

Shrauger: "Gallatin County Emergency Management was the recipient of a FEMA Project Impact Grant. We were able to use funds for this grant to implement mitigation projects."

### **Why did you decide to get a portable emergency advisory radio system?**

Shrauger: "Gallatin County Emergency Management was looking for another way to notify our customers in the event of an emergency. We were aware of the local 530 AM highway advisory systems and decided to take a look at a similar system to meet our needs. Once we got in contact with ISS the decision was easy. Some of the key decision-making features were . . .

1. The ability to choose from three different power sources [RoadRunnR is powered by 6 unbreakable solar panels, a ten-day operational battery backup system or AC power plug-in].
2. The ability to update messages three different ways [cellphone, landline and locally].
3. The fact that we have a choice of two different frequencies.
4. And also the ability to add NOAA weather radio to the system.

"The customer service that we have received throughout the process has been exceptional. All of our questions have been answered in a timely manner, and any changes that we wanted to make were considered. ISS has great customer service, helpful staff, quick delivery times, ability to customize (HARPS look good in red), interested in the customers perspective to help improve future versions of the product, great training on use of radios, attention to detail (the labels on the wires, signs on the fenders)."  
[Information Station Specialists provided advance shipment. licensing and on-site demonstration of one unit at a Montana Association of Counties meeting; and ISS owner Bill Baker appeared on local television, explaining how the system works to people in the community.]

**What advice do you have for emergency managers in other communities who might be considering such a system?**

Shrauger: "Get as many as you can, as soon as you can. If great customer service and an excellent product are key to your organizational values, strongly consider ISS as a potential vender for these pieces of equipment."



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