

Case Study

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

BENEFITS

The MCA gains a cost-effective solution that includes response within specified times from skilled engineers all around the country. A dedicated team of Arqiva engineers in Dover is working on the transition to the new Channel Navigation Information Service, supporting operators training to use the wider functionality, and introducing processes to raise standards of maintenance across the Agency's communications equipment. In addition, Arqiva's dedicated management service support is available to the MCA for advice and specialist help with infrastructure and forward planning issues.



“ We handle over 13,000 emergency cases a year, so we need a technical partner who can guarantee an extremely high quality of service. Arqiva has a great deal of experience in this area and we are looking forward to building on this and working together over the next five years. ”

Richard Parkes, Director, Technical Services,
Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Business issue

The UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency works to prevent loss of life, improve maritime safety and protect the marine environment. With 400 sites around the country's coastline and responsibility for monitoring all shipping traffic in the heavily used Dover Straits, the Agency must have a reliable communications infrastructure with access

to fast, expert support and advice on resolving technical issues and migrating to new systems. Arqiva's Public Safety group had provided maintenance for the previous 10 years, and was invited to compete for a new contract with increased responsibilities.

Solution

The Agency awarded Arqiva, a contract to provide a wider range of maintenance and support services, for a minimum of five years. Arqiva has a well-established national network of experienced communications engineers, and so is ready to meet the Agency's need for fast response to outages and other problems at sites around the country. As part of the contract, Arqiva also has a permanent presence at the MCA's facility in Dover, where it is developing a Centre of Excellence for maintenance and support.

Safer lives, safer ships, cleaner seas

Britain's Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has some 150 remote radio sites around the country that provide coverage for the UK's sea area and shoreline. The Agency provides the UK's maritime distress and safety communications, and has wide responsibilities for search and rescue, ship safety standards and pollution prevention – handling more than 13,000 emergency cases a year.

For the Search & Rescue field alone, the MCA's technical service co-ordinates a network of six Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres, 13 sub-centres and 64 sector bases. "We depend on a reliable radio infrastructure," explains John Morphew, MCA Technical Manager. "So we need to have confidence in a technical partner who can guarantee an extremely high quality of service."

A major part of the Agency's work is generated by the high-profile Channel Navigation Information Service. Based in Dover, the service monitors all shipping traffic in the Dover

Straits, one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Its replacement in 2003 enhanced the joint British/French service with new functionality to boost traffic separation and counter-pollution measures. The change prompted the MCA to look for a technical partner to support the national network of radio sites and also ensure a smooth transition to the new facility.

Best practice tendering

Arqiva had maintained the MCA's radio infrastructure for the previous 10 years, and was invited to re-compete against other companies for a contract to provide a broader range of maintenance and support services. In March 2002, Arqiva, was awarded the £8 million contract, which will run at least until 2007. "We followed a stringently controlled, best-practice tendering process appropriate to the scale and importance of the contract," says John Morphew. "Our criteria included both technical capability and best value, and we believe that with Arqiva, we have the most cost effective solution to match our environment."

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Under the contract, Arqiva provides maintenance and management service support for the MCA network around mainland Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This includes preventive and routine maintenance as well as emergency call-outs. Specified response times depend on the severity of the problem – for example engineers are contracted to respond to an outage at a main site within six hours.

“A local team of Arqiva engineers in Dover provides 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week support to the critical radar tracking system and Integrated Coastguard Communications System that support the Channel Navigation Information Service. The team will also be a centre of excellence for developing working practices on the national systems, identifying potential service-affecting issues, and improving system reliability. This reduces system downtime, and over time helps reduce infrastructure support costs. **”**

Richard Parkes, Director, Technical Services, Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Building national resources

Work started on replacing the communication system for the increasingly important Channel Navigation Information Service in 2003, with an Arqiva team providing on-site engineering support to ensure the smooth transition and running of the new facility. A key part of the Service was an updated radar tracking system. The information it gathers will form a database that will become a national resource for counter-pollution measures, port-waste control and other safety and environmental protection activities.

Arqiva engineers are based permanently at the MCA in Dover to support the new system, and are on hand to provide training and help for operators who need to become familiar with the increased functionality as quickly as possible.

Also in Dover, the Arqiva team is developing a national ‘centre of excellence’ for maintenance and support for the Agency’s communications. All IT elements for which Arqiva is responsible will pass through this centre as they are scheduled for test or repair. By closely monitoring product performance in parallel with maintenance and repair procedures, Arqiva is developing an in-depth understanding of the life cycle of all the products in use. Through this, the team is working for continuous improvements in quality that will raise overall standards all along the maintenance supply chain.



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Added value

As part of Arqiva's management service support, the MCA can call on Arqiva for specialist advice. “With our VHF coverage reaching out 30 nautical miles, we could be looking for advice in connection with our hilltop sites around the coast,” says John Morphew. “For example, sites sometimes need re-positioning due to coastal erosion – and Arqiva assists with predictive coverage information.”

Real added value comes from the dedicated resources assigned by Arqiva to support the MCA contract. This consists of a core team of Arqiva technical specialists that manages all day-to-day issues on site, and directs Arqiva's own work force to resolve problems quickly at sites around the country. Radio equipment in the MCA's vehicles is also installed by Arqiva, and the company has developed a good level of expertise in positioning PMR equipment in the Agency's varied fleet.

There are many examples of Arqiva teams adding even greater value by going beyond contracted responsibilities to keep the MCA's communications running. In one instance when the electricity supply could not be restored to a remote site for some days, Arqiva engineers sourced and connected a generator to power the communications systems until the normal supply was restored.

Committed to high standards

Arqiva has built up considerable expertise through its work with more than 75 % of the UK's emergency services, and the company is committed to providing communications support and equipment to the UK's essential services teams.

“Arqiva has long experience in the areas that are critical to our operations, and is set up for the nation-wide response we need,” John Morphew continues. “We have found its service to be of a very good standard, and expect to develop an even better working relationship over the life of the contract.”

Working in partnership with the MCA, Arqiva will provide a fully integrated support service to ensure that the Agency has a reliable communications infrastructure to continue the work of safeguarding Britain's coasts and the seafaring community.

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