

For more information:

Diana Minglis
TC Communications
02 9714 5100
dianam@tc.com.au

TC Communications installs Australia's first Swift Broadband Lite Solution on Victorian Fire Spotting planes

Australia's preferred aero platform - the small to mid size plane - can now access full broadband Inmarsat I4 capabilities.

In the wake of the February 2009 bush-fire catastrophe, the Victorian government has acquired new approaches to firefighting.

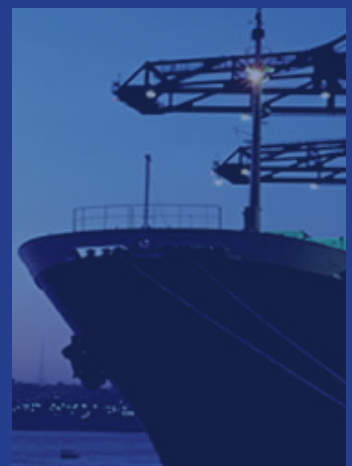
The adoption of this state of the art technology in satellite communications brings Victoria's State Aircraft Unit to a position of technological leadership in the area of firefighting. Fire spotting aircraft managed by the unit are now able to share gathered data in real time (via the Inmarsat I4 satellite network) with any of the 43 incident control centres throughout the state. This solution provides simultaneous voice and data communications directly from the plane as it flies over the fire zone.

TC Communications worked closely with the SUA to develop and deliver a system that allows full broadband functionality to the planes regardless of how remote their location and despite how small the aircraft. Todd McDonell, CEO of TC Communications, says providing satellite communications capabilities to small aircraft will assist Australian authorities to manage the country's unique environmental factors that cause catastrophic natural disasters.

Smaller Planes Can Now Access Big Plane Technology

"We have had great success over the years in installing aircraft communications systems on larger aircraft like those used by the Australian Border Protection Command. However the current advances in technology allow us to take satellite communications to a much broader market and deliver the benefits to the wider community. As an immense land mass with many remote regions, small to mid-size aircraft are the preferred aero platform in Australia and the potential for productivity and economy of this type of aircraft has improved significantly with the ability to install mobile broadband capabilities."

TC Communications is an Inmarsat Gold Partner and recognised Australian aeronautical satcom specialist. With the completion of the second installation of the Thrane&Thrane SwiftBroadband Lite terminals into the SUA's Super King B200 and Cessna 404 Titan planes, the feedback from the client has been all positive.



More Efficiency and Cost Effective Missions

“For us, this means providing real-time snapshots of a fire zone - regardless of how remote the location” says Adam Damen, Technical Specialist, SAU. “We recently sent one of our planes to Tasmania to assist with a small bushfire north west of Hobart. We were able to fly down, transmit the data and fly back to the mainland without ever having to land the plane - a huge success both in terms of the cost of the mission and the capability provided.”

As well as mapping fire activity, Victorian fire agencies also use the technology to assist in planning for resources needed to fight fires by mapping the areas that are fire bombed and monitoring the effectiveness of the method in containing fires. They can also scan the speed and direction of the fire front to enable projections to be made regarding future fire activity and resources required to address this.

No More Flying in Circles Over Radio Sites or Dropping Findings onto Empty Fields

All this is a far cry from the methods adopted in years gone by “I recall a period in the 80s” Damen recollects “when firefighting planes would fly over a fire zone and print the images onto spools of paper, which would then be interpreted and the findings put into a tube and dropped onto an empty cricket pitch for pick-up”

The SAU is an initiative of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). The SAU provides specialist aviation resources to satisfy fire and land management objectives in the state of Victoria. The SAU maintained a fleet of 40 aircraft in the 2009/10 fire season, including one DC10 air tanker, two Erickson Aircranes, and the two infrared scanning aircraft – the Super King Air B200 and Cessna 404 Titan.

