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Smart technology

The arctic conditions which hit the UK after days of heavy snow in the first couple of weeks of 2010 brought complete chaos to the country – as we have come to expect in these circumstances. Roads were closed, trains delayed and cancelled, airport runways closed, many schools closed and so on – including the usual stories of motorists trapped in their cars overnight on snow-blocked motorways. Many councils ran short of salt and grit or were unable to take new deliveries because of the snow!

During cold spells, as well as transport systems, the utilities' infrastructure is put under severe pressure with abnormally high demand for gas and electricity. National grid reported a record demand for gas on 7 January at 454 million cubic metres. Major customers had to cut back on usage. However thousands of homes across Britain were without electricity because of trees falling on power lines and safety mechanisms being triggered by ice weighing down cables.

At the time of writing the cold weather continues – but we can foresee flooding arising during the thaw and a dramatic increase in road works caused by frost and snow damage to the road network. All of this is not going to help the already fragile economic recovery and it is not a great way to see in the New Year.

But it is all then more sad since we know that there is lots of technology out there, including GIS systems which could be deployed to mitigate avoidable disasters like this. Is there any difference between flooding, drought or big freeze? Thermal surveying to reduce energy consumption, utility asset management models, road traffic models, risk assessment based on geo-data and geo-statistical modelling, flood planning etc all of which have been illustrated in this magazine are perhaps still not being fully utilised. We wonder if this is because of a defective political and administrative system or is it in part due to an inward looking GIS industry or both?

We have presented in this issue a report on "smart technology" which will be vital to help us manage essential energy and water resources and this is an ideal area for GIS to make a major contribution. Some companies are moving in that direction: "GIS are ideally placed as a key integration technology within the suite of utility information systems" asserts Phil Francis, from Informed Solutions, when asked to comment on the role of GIS within Smart Utility as well as other stress the importance of data-quality and visualisation (see article pg. 32). But the turnout from GIS suppliers to the smart utility conference was not substantial.

The big question is whether the geo-sector can really broaden its horizons and assist the imperative new needs of the infrastructure industry or is it just 'recycling' what is already in the pot? Can our industry work with others in a mature exchange of knowledge and technology or will it remain in its niche comfort zone? More utility and other infrastructure conferences are on the annual event programme so the opportunity to be there with aggressive technology plans is ours – will we seize it?



TOP TEN

Offshore energy site investigations

Environmental consultants Aquatera (www.aquatera.co.uk) and marine GI specialists SeaZone, have teamed up to offer a unique marine mapping and information solution to the offshore energy industry. Developed primarily to support the growing renewable energy sector, software from Aquatera combines different datasets including the latest marine geographic information data from SeaZone. "For example, using a combination of RADMAP and SeaZone's bathymetry data we can find not only areas of suitable water depth for specific projects but also to define seabed morphology, habitat types as well as whether the sea floor is rocky or sedimentary," commented Duncan Clarke, Aquatera. www.SeaZone.com

GIS and SDI

Government strategies to ensure social equality, economic growth, and environmental protection are among the many global perspectives addressed in Land Administration for Sustainable Development, the latest publication from ESRI Press. The book describes new and innovative policies, systems, and technologies now being applied around the world. Recognizing that all countries or jurisdictions are unique and have their own legislative policies, the book also highlights fundamental elements such as the implementation of GIS with spatial data infrastructure (SDI). The authors view this infrastructure as the "key to the spatial enablement of modern land administration." www.esri.com/esripressorders

Roads from the sky

Dorset's A35 and C6 roads form a crucial link down to the county's south coast. To improve this link and therefore relieve seasonal road congestion on over-capacity neighbouring routes, Dorset County Council has commissioned multidisciplinary engineering consultancy Buro Happold to prepare a feasibility study into bypass options for the village of Bere Regis. The consultancy has used UK based aerial imaging and survey specialist Bluesky's 3D map system which creates digital maps captured by aircraft mounted lasers. Bluesky has also supplied high resolution aerial photography that has been used to create 3D fly-throughs and visualisations of the resulting designs. www.bluesky-world.com

Read the full article at www.geoconnexion.com/geouk_articles.php

Sharing knowledge

Forth Valley GIS is proud to announce its success at the recent European SDI Best Practice Awards 2009. The GIS Company was selected from 135 entries across 26 European countries as a best practice example of a Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) – a business framework that enables ready access to geographic information to support the improved delivery of public services. The SDI Best Practice Award is part of the eSDI-Net+ project, which aims to bring together key European SDI stakeholders to share knowledge and to provide a platform for communication and knowledge exchange at all levels, from local to global. www.forthvalleygis.co.uk