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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



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AGI annual awards

Northumbrian Water (NW) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) of NI - both STAR-APIC customers - won prestigious awards for Innovation and Best Practice at the Association of Geographic Information (AGI) annual awards event last December. NW were recognised for their Operational Planning and Management (OPM) application which helps the company deal with the impact

of planned or emergency events in the water supply network. DARD won the Central Government Award for the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) administration system. NICMS is a 7-year, £220 million agri-environment scheme designed to help farmers and landowners and improve the environment.

www.star-apic.co.uk

Techo-age for National Trust surveys

Ormston Technology, provider of professional GPS devices, has work underway with the National Trust to identify and locate each and every plant and vegetable in more than eighty National Trust gardens. This immense three year survey will encapsulate details of the wide range of plants growing in National Trust gardens in England, Wales and

Northern Ireland.

Information from all of the survey work carried out in the gardens will be entered into a central database. Mike Calnan, Head of Parks and Gardens at the National Trust, said: "This is the biggest and most comprehensive plant survey ever undertaken in the UK".

www.ormtec.co.uk

The key to tackling fuel poverty

Northgate Public Services says that more power and resources should be handed to Local Authorities (LAs) in order to combat climate change and reduce fuel poverty in our local communities. Responding to the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation on fuel poverty strategy, Northgate argued early in January, that the issue of climate

change is so severe that a statutory role for LAs in addressing energy efficiency is now essential. Northgate also calls upon the Assembly Government, the UK Government and local authorities to work together to encourage the take-up of energy advice and benefits to those affected by fuel poverty. www.northgate-ispublicservices.com

People's Map of London Launched

The People's Map has launched its map of London, covering over 400 sq km. This is a truly independent map of the nation's capital city, free of Crown Copyright and derived data issues. It is suitable for use by anyone whether they be a marketer, cartographer, GIS professional, the public... The remainder of London, within the

M25, will be available in early 2010. The People's Map is a web-based mapping project (www.peoplesmap.com), which allows anyone to become part of the map creation and maintenance process: visit the website, register and then 'draw' over Getmapping orthorectified aerial photography. www.getmapping.com

West End without leaving home!

Near's interactive environment, called NearLondon, is made possible by the convergence of 3D laser scanning, digital modeling and gaming technologies. It is the first in a planned series of interactive 3D cityscapes from Near. (www.nearglobal.com/About.aspx). At the centre of the development process is Geomagic Studio software. The novelty is that

the new environment provides a totally immersive 3D experience for visitors and vendors. The biggest challenge in the NearLondon project was the size of the data generated by the laser scanner. There are more than 1,000 data sets in the initial cityscape, each approximately 500 MB in size.

www.geomagic.com

Parish Online

Access to Ordnance Survey maps and Getmapping aerial photography with full NLPG search via the web. Parish Online helps Parish Councils to manage their business and communicate with their citizens more effectively through the use of Ordnance Survey digital maps and Getmapping aerial photog-

raphy. As simple to use as Google Maps, Parish Online simply requires a computer with a broadband internet connection. The service is accessed through a web browser so there is nothing to install and it can even be accessed from home. www.parish-online.co.uk