

**Ross firm to give businesses emergency link**  
**SSI network allows info to be relayed in disaster**  
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by [Kris B. Mamula](#)

A Ross Township company will create a resource database and emergency communications network for western Pennsylvania businesses free of charge in exchange for the opportunity to grow a segment of its business nationwide.

**SSI Services Inc.**, which recently moved to Ross from Downtown, is developing the database and network for members of the Pittsburgh Regional Business Coalition for Homeland Security, a nonprofit agency that is helping businesses plan for disaster recovery, said John Degory, director of SSI's Knowledge Center Business Unit. The value of the contribution is about \$50,000, which is expected to help double or triple the size of the company's six-year-old business unit.

"We'll have some big increases in staffing in this group over the next two years," Degory said, adding that SSI has already received an inquiry about the project from the West Coast.

He declined to disclose his company's revenue or number of employees who will be added.

The network will link business leaders with county EMS directors, who will be able to relay key information by business type or location during a disaster. No such link exists today.

An aggressive effort will continue for the next four to six months to sign up businesses for the free services, said Mike Comiskey, executive director of the Pittsburgh Regional Business Coalition for Homeland Security, a nonprofit disaster preparedness group that is based Downtown.

Among the first companies enrolled was Moon Township-based FedEx Ground, where some 2,000 people work.

"Early notification is very important to everybody," said Steve Ward, facilities security manager for FedEx Ground. "It's a quick and easy way for us to get information."

Last year, SSI received a \$2.9 million contract from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Counterterrorism Task Force to provide disaster management services to the 13 counties around Pittsburgh. EMS managers can access the network from anywhere, and Allegheny County's system operates out of the county's 911 dispatch center in North Point Breeze. The business network and database for resources such as heavy equipment, generators and buses will also be fully integrated into the county 911 center.

"This is a huge effort," Comiskey said. "It's the first big outgrowth of the coalition and business partnership."

The database and network are the first in Pennsylvania and may become a model in the state, Comiskey said.

Such systems are used in other areas, including New York, New Jersey and San Francisco. The database, the first phase of the project, is expected to be operational by the end of May.

A way to communicate between county EMS directors and businesses was initially envisioned as part of an emergency network that is being developed by the **University of Pittsburgh Medical Center**, but was later moved to the county's 911 center, said Kathleen Criss, director of the UPMC disaster management center.

"It just made more sense," Criss said. "We don't own or operate the business assets."

UPMC's system will provide near real-time information about such things as hospital bed capacity and blood test results, and Criss said it should be fully operational by the end of the year.

The system will also link to the Pennsylvania National Guard. Funding for the UPMC system came from an \$8.5 million federal grant last year.

SSI's primary business is managing government classified facilities, and the privately held company employs between 600 and 1,000 people at offices in Ross, Falls Church, Va., and Harrisburg.

*kmamula@bizjournals.com | (412) 208-3825*