

KZN community safety activists now Saab Gracan powered

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KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) community safety activists are being equipped with Enfora Mini-MT GPS-powered hand held tracking devices to better support the police and emergency services in the province.

Developed for the KZN Department of Community Safety and Liaison by Gracan Communications and Saab, the Enfora forms part of the Khoisan Civil Command-and-Control System enables the volunteers to raise the alarm, lets them communicate with a call centre and allows that call centre to track their movements.

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Provincial Transport, Community Safety and Liaison MEC Willies Mchunu says 1100 volunteers in Durban and in the Jozini area near the border with Mozambique are already equipped with the Enfora Mini MT that is roughly the size of a standard cell phone, but without a keypad.

“This device ... really empowers community safety activists to work closely with the emergency services and the [police] Mchunu said at a launch event in Durban yesterday.

“As we gather experience in its day-to-day use we are establishing standard operating procedures and we will seek to roll the project out in other appropriate areas in the province.”

“This is an important technological step forward which will assist us in bringing peace and stability to our communities,” added Mchunu. He says the “volunteers serve as the ‘eyes and ears’ of their communities and compliment the efforts of ... local emergency services, law enforcement, and crime prevention agencies. They help improve safety and security by maintaining an active presence in their neighbourhoods and liaising with members of their community.”

A joint press release by the department, Gracan and Saab notes that an integrated battery ensures that the device cannot be switched off by the volunteers and that they are traceable at all times while on duty.

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Volunteers are expected to patrol independently on foot or – in the case of field supervisors – by car.

When a button is pressed, the device automatically sends a message to the Volunteer Communication and Tracking Management Call Centre in Durban, identifying the volunteer and – using a built in GPS capability and Google Earth – his or her exact location.

This allows the Call Centre to direct police or emergency services to respond rapidly to incidents, preventing or stopping crimes or fights, or attending to other emergencies.

The phone function on the handset allows the Call Centre to initiate voice communication with community safety volunteers wherever they are dealing with an incident, whether a tavern, on the street, or elsewhere.

Software integrated into the Call Centre allows all calls to be logged, mapped, and tracked for use in further emergency action, investigations or prosecutions.

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Saab Security and Aviation Systems General Manager Sisa Tanda says his company was very pleased to work with “our colleagues in Gracan Communications in developing this particularly user friendly solution to a specifically South African challenge.”

“It is another important step on the path to safer communities using technologies developed and integrated locally in partnership with government,” he added.

Gracan CEO Pieter Meyer says initial experience with the system “shows that it can make a real difference in empowering communities to support the police in fighting crime and to help the emergency services in providing assistance in critical situations, sometimes over vast areas.”

“The excellent working environment and support the ... department ... has created continues to be crucial to the success of this very important pilot project, which we are confident will lead to expansion of the system nationally.”

The pilot project will run for two years.

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The volunteer system was introduced by Mchunu's predecessor, Bheki Cele, who is now national police commissioner.