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**Nomad Global Communication Solutions secures contract with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

## **Kalispell on the Front Lines of National Disaster Response**



Will Schmutz, president and CEO of Nomad Global Communication Solutions (GCS), stands in the backup command unit for Flathead County 911 center custom designed by the Flathead Valley based technologies company. Nomad GCS landed a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to send their mobile command centers on disaster-response missions across the nation. - Lido Vizzutti/Flathead Beacon

By [Myers Reece](#) , 04-08-10

Eight years ago, four friends in their mid-20s had an idea and a barn. The idea was to improve communication for firefighting efforts. The barn was the workplace where they would figure out exactly how to hatch their plan.

Today, the guys at Nomad GCS have a 25,000-square-foot facility near Glacier Park International Airport, 30 employees and, now, a contract with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to send their mobile command centers on disaster-response missions across the nation.

Will Schmutz, president and CEO of Nomad GCS, said the contract is the company's largest to date, assuming all performance-based criteria are met.

Nomad will initially build two 46-foot, 10-wheeled command centers for the Corps. If the Corps is satisfied, up to 13 more could be on the horizon, Schmutz said. He expects the additional work to bring in 10 more employees, from engineers to marketers.

"It's an amazing deal," Schmutz said. "It has a tremendous amount of potential for us on the federal level."

Schmutz added that the Corps of Engineers responds to all significant national emergencies, including

Hurricane Katrina.

“Every major event, these guys are there,” he said.

When the idea for Nomad GCS first arose, Schmautz and his brother Seth, along with friends Clayton Binford and Shane Ackerly, were raft guides in the Flathead. The Schmautzes are from Kalispell, Ackerly is from Bigfork and Binford is from Boise. Because their raft company’s buses were used to transport wildfire-fighting crews, the four friends moonlighted as bus drivers.

It was on these trips that they saw how useful a mobile command center could be in wildfire situations. Often stationed at remote wilderness camps, crews experienced difficulties communicating with off-site commanders. So the raft guides got entrepreneurial, acquired a barn workspace through family connections and went to work.

As the vision grew, it became clear that the command centers could be used by many different entities and for many different scenarios, not just wildfire fighting. And it also became clear, very quickly, that a lot of people wanted their products.

Between the four of them, the young entrepreneurs started off with a hodgepodge background in biology, chemistry, rhetoric, business, physics and math. They settled into their specialty roles and brought on knowledgeable experts as the company expanded.

“In order to do what we do for a living, we need to have experts in a lot of different things,” Schmautz said.

Whether responding to a fire or a hurricane or another emergency, Nomad’s mobile command centers serve as the coordination hubs for a range of crews. The Army has also used the centers for training. To date, Schmautz said about 50 percent of the company’s gross revenues have come from military contracts. Less than 5 percent, he said, comes from firefighting.

Because they use satellite technology, the command centers are reliable in even the most trying conditions. If a natural disaster knocks out terrestrial communication lines on the ground, Nomad can keep the disparate crews and commanders in touch with each other through the satellite capabilities.

Also, Nomad’s centers have the technology to allow entities with different communication forms – such as cell phones to radios – to connect. Each unit is custom built for the customer’s need, incorporating complex computer systems of varying components.

With the units, disaster crews can have access to audio, video and data technology. Nomad has more than 70 units operating in the field, Schmautz said, many of which are in the natural disaster-riddled Southeastern U.S. In addition to disaster-response units, Nomad also produces centers such as a mobile crime lab used in Tennessee.

Some units are closer to home. At the facility last week, Schmautz listed a mobile classroom for Montana State University, a mobile weigh station for the state Department of Transportation and a backup command unit for the new Flathead County 911 center. If the 911 center goes down for any reason, operations would be run out of Nomad’s backup unit.

During emergency operations, crews stay in touch with Nomad officials, through Internet, phone or radio. Schmautz said this occasionally necessitates midnight phone calls.

“We’re always involved in some way, shape or form,” Schmautz said.

“I can’t tell you I’ve ever had a boring day,” he added. “I’ve had plenty that are too exciting.”

While Nomad has the capacity to build everything, including infrastructure for the actual trailers and trucks, Schmautz said the company’s focus has always been the technology and communication aspects.

“We didn’t want to sell trucks,” Schmautz said. “We wanted to sell communication.”

When the four friends first began tinkering around with this command center idea, Schmautz said they never envisioned Nomad growing into what it is today.

“None of us thought it was a career move,” Schmautz said. “It’s been a wild ride.”



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