



FirstNet phones prove vital in disaster response

**Agency/Organization needs**

Updated technology for public safety forces

**Networking solution**

FirstNet delivers priority access to voice, data, video, location, and interoperability services on the nationwide network for first responders

**Agency value**

Enhanced community and first responder safety

**Industry focus**

Law enforcement

**Size**

700+ employees serving and protecting 400,000 Forsyth County residents

Embracing technology to keep people safe

When Sheriff Bobby F. Kimbrough Jr., was elected Forsyth County, North Carolina's first African American sheriff in 2018, he set out to create a first-class law enforcement agency that would be respected in the county and throughout the country. Updating the department's technology became a top priority.

Having served in law enforcement at the local, state, and federal levels, Kimbrough had seen society and technology change in that time. "I've always said that if you're standing still, you'll become stagnant, and eventually, you'll become obsolete," notes Kimbrough. "Whether it's technology, how you think, or how you lead, you have to constantly evolve."

When it comes to first response, communication is Priority 1

Reliable connectivity during disasters

Kimbrough acknowledges that he was initially skeptical when he heard about FirstNet, the broadband network for America's first responders. But he quickly recognized its value when Hurricane Helene caused catastrophic flooding and landslides in western North Carolina. "Life has a way of making all of us believers," he said.

Just after the hurricane, Kimbrough and about 20 deputies were traveling in a convoy to assist the Buncombe County, North Carolina sheriff when he noticed that he and most others had no connection on their personal or work cell phones. One staff member who had a FirstNet phone had no problem making calls. "I took his phone and called back to the office, saying, 'Get me as many FirstNet phones as you can,'" he said.

When Kimbrough arrived in Buncombe County and found that the sheriff's office had no connectivity, he gave the department the FirstNet phones he had just purchased. He's grateful to the staffer who suggested buying FirstNet phones. "If I had not listened to him," he recalls, "we would've been up the river without a paddle, as my mother would say."

"FirstNet kept us connected with the world. FirstNet is what I would call lifesaving technology because, in a critical situation, it's the tools you have that will sustain you," he noted. "If you don't have the correct tools and technology, then you exacerbate the situation."

The power of technology

Under Kimbrough's leadership, the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office has become one of the most technologically advanced agencies in the country. It partnered with Duke University and the American Heart Association to equip drones with automated external defibrillators (AEDs). When a call comes in that someone needs help, the sheriff's office can dispatch a drone to the site before an ambulance or cruiser can arrive.



"During that critical incident, FirstNet is what we were able to get connected on."

Sheriff Bobby F. Kimbrough Jr.

Solutions for mission-critical operations

Forsyth County was one of the first to introduce Live 9-1-1, which routes calls to patrol cars and the dispatch center at the same time. The county also pioneered StarChase, a program that enables law enforcement to track vehicles during high-speed chases. “We can launch a dart at a car and don’t even have to chase it anymore. The dart enables GPS tracking for the next 12 hours anywhere in the world,” the sheriff explained.

The county’s expert use of technology caught the attention of the New York Police Department. “The NYPD had heard about our drones as first responders, and so we showed them how to set the program up. As a result, they invited us to come to New York as their guests for the September 11th memorial,” Kimbrough said. “We understand the power of technology.”



FirstNet carried the water

Sheriff Kimbrough’s law enforcement career has placed him in danger numerous times. “I lived in Puerto Rico when a hurricane hit there, and I was part of 9/11. I was also part of the Olympics in 1996 when the bomb went off in Centennial Park, so I’ve seen my share of critical incidents and responses. Time matters, lives matter. And in any critical incident, you’ve got to have communications,” he said. “That’s paramount because if you’re part of the command team or decision-making process, you need to have the ability to summon the resources, tools, and everything else you need. If you can’t, you have a problem.”

Most people don’t understand what takes place during a critical incident such as a hurricane when there is no electricity, phones, running water, heat, or air conditioning. The command center in Buncombe County spent several days trying to determine how to communicate with deputies and other agencies. “People are relying on you to restore them. You’ve got to have a way to communicate,” Kimbrough said.

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Sheriff Bobby F. Kimbrough Jr.

“The truth of the matter is that during that critical time, FirstNet was what worked. It was FirstNet that carried the water that day. It was FirstNet that allowed us to communicate. I spent six or seven weeks in Buncombe County, so I know what worked. Now I always keep FirstNet phones with me because that’s what worked.”

“Forsyth County has come to rely on the FirstNet mobility consultant who recommended the technology. She ensures we have everything we need.”

Kimbrough has recommended FirstNet to fellow sheriffs. “Forsyth County is the drum major as far as I’m concerned. We set the tone, and many people look to Forsyth County because of some of the things we have stood up and demonstrated,” he said. “And so, I have shared with my circle that they need to ensure they have these tools because, in a critical incident, they will need them.”