



News Release

United States Navy

Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command
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Release Nr. NR-2001-014

Friday, April 6, 2001

SPAWAR provides Iridium phones for field-test in Polar Trek 2001

SAN DIEGO — The Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command has provided two Iridium satellite telephones to the members of Polar Trek 2001 for field-testing during their 12-day ski-trek from Northern Russia to the North Pole. Polar Trek members will test the first-generation handsets for viability under polar environmental conditions.

“The team’s use of the satellite telephones on their trip to the North Pole will allow SPAWAR to gather some data about battery life, the ability to use a solar battery recharger under real world conditions, operation of the handsets in the cold and austere Arctic environment, and the ability to make and complete calls in the communications challenged polar region,” said John Hurthere, SPAWAR Commercial SatCom Projects Manager. The off-the-shelf hand-held satellite telephones on loan from SPAWAR are the first generation handsets that were sold to commercial and private customers before the earlier service was terminated last year.

SPAWAR had acquired about 20 first-generation Motorola handsets (the 9500) for use on the former Iridium satellite communications system. These handsets are being replaced by the Model 9505 that has a secure communications capability for use under the Defense Information Systems Agency’s two-year unlimited airtime contract with the new Iridium Satellite LLC.

SPAWAR is testing the latest Motorola handset (the 9505) for the Navy to determine its capability and applicability for current and near-term communications requirements. While most of the testing involves five of the newer model (9505) units with the secure communications module, SPAWAR staff saw that the Polar Trek team’s communications needs would provide an ideal opportunity to test capabilities of the system and related equipment in polar areas at no cost to the government.

“There is enough commonality between the two satellite telephone models that we can gain some insight into limitations and capabilities of the system and equipment in Arctic and Antarctic conditions without having to go there ourselves,” Hurthere said.

One additional benefit of the Polar Trek 2001 team’s use of the Iridium system in the Arctic is the opportunity to test the phones during high geomagnetic storm activity. The sun is at the 11-year point where tremendous numbers of storms interact with the earth’s magnetic field. These storms in space frequently affect land and space-based communications systems – rendering some useless for days – especially in the areas of the earth’s magnetic poles.

SPAWAR’s commercial communications projects staff will meet with Polar Trek 2001 members after their return to the United States to gather information on the team’s experience with the equipment.

The Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) is one of the Department of the Navy's three major acquisition commands. Its mission is to enable knowledge superiority for the warfighter through the development, acquisition and life cycle support of effective, capable and integrated C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), IT (Information Technology), and Space Systems. We strive to deliver these systems as an integrated end-to-end operational capability for the fleet.

Polar Trek 2001 is an all-woman trek on cross-country skis to the North Pole and is sponsored by the WomenQuest Foundation as a way to educate and inspire young women. More information about the organization and the Polar Trek 2001 effort may be found on the group's Website at www.womenquest.org. The site includes an extensive curriculum for middle-school children.

For more information contact:

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