

Remote Sensing Applications Working Group, Meeting Minutes

17 April 2003, 3:00 PM to 5:30PM, Main Commerce Room 1412

Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction (SDR)

**approved by co-chairs*

Co-Chairs: Rosalind Helz, USGS
Steve Ambrose, NASA

Attendees:

NASA
Steve Ambrose, NASA HQ

US Forest Service
Bill Belton

NOAA
Darci Glass Royal, NOAA/GRS
Joel Corcoran, NOAA/GRS
John Periera, NOAA/NESDIS (by phone)
Levin Lauritson, NOAA/NESDIS
Michael Hales, NOAA/NESDIS
Peter Colohan, NOAA/GRS
Ray Simmons, NOAA/GRS

USGS
Brenda Jones, USGS/EROS Data Center
Rosalind Helz, USGS

USDOT
K. Thirumalai, USDOT/RSPA

NSF
Rick Fragaszy, NSF

I. Call to Order

Rosalind Helz called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM and led a round of participant introductions.

II. Presentation (Summary)

A briefing on the International Charter: Space and Major Disasters, Ray Simmons and Darci Glass-Royal, GRS Solutions

At the request of Helen Wood, SDR Chair and U.S. Representative to the Board of Directors of the International Charter: Space and Major Disasters, Ray Simmons and Darci Glass-Royal presented an overview of the Charter, its mission, and activities. The Charter's mission is to coordinate emergency civil satellite information sharing among space agencies around the world in the event of a major disaster, and provide that information to end users as quickly as possible. NOAA is the lead U.S. agency for facilitating U.S. participation in the Charter, serving as the gateway agency for all U.S. data users and providers participating in, or taking advantage of, Charter mechanisms.

The presentation highlighted the Charter's membership, history, and activation process, and gave examples of Charter activation scenarios. The presenters also initiated a discussion on how Federal agencies and entities would participate in and take advantage of Charter mechanisms. An extended Q&A/discussion session followed, which center around three main areas, outlined below:

A. The Role of Federal agency and other entity participation in the Charter

The presenters and co-chairs led participants in an exploratory discussion of two central questions:

- Which federal entities should be recognized as Charter-affiliated agencies within the United States, who may request Charter activation on behalf of end-users of Charter data?
- Which agencies could provide individuals to fulfill the Project Manager function described in the Charter?

Participants agreed that creating a list of official U.S. affiliated agencies and entities would be necessary, that agencies affiliating with the Charter should designate an agency lead for Charter-related matters, and that a cadre of project managers would need to be assembled. Though no specific agencies or names were determined or recommended, participants agreed these questions would be explored further within their own agencies and through interagency discussions with NOAA. During this conversation, Brenda Jones also raised the question of whether individual States could request activation of the Charter through NOAA. It was agreed that future discussion of this issue would be required.

Participants also discussed briefly the engagement of other U.S. agencies, such as USGS and NASA, as additional data providers to the Charter. The presenters clarified that NOAA has initiated discussions with both agencies on this topic. Steve Ambrose mentioned that NASA's mission is focused on research, not operational tasks, and negotiating NASA involvement in the Charter may need to be approached differently than from other agencies. However, it was agreed NASA involvement is possible and should be investigated further.

B. Definition of "Emergency" and Criteria for Charter Activation

Charter activation requires an emergency situation (see presentation slide 7). The presenters emphasized that "emergency" is not precisely defined, but certain guidelines exist. A regular or anticipated event should not initiate Charter activation, while an unusual event could activate the Charter. For example, the Charter's Executive Secretariat recently concluded that a regular, predictable flood, such as the annual flooding of the Nile, could not provide a basis for Charter activation, but unpredicted extensive flooding or unusually high water levels could qualify as an "emergency" under the Charter.

K. Thirumalai asked if major transportation accidents could be considered "emergencies" under the Charter. The presenters and Levin Lauritson agreed that large or significant accidents could be considered emergencies. For example, while Charter satellites may not have the resolution to identify smaller objects, Charter imagery could be used to pinpoint the location of an accident, such as a plane crash or rail disaster in remote areas. Mr. Thirumalai suggested that, in such an emergency, the Charter could add a global dimension to DOT response efforts.

B. Belton inquired as to whether Charter could be activated for Burned Area Emergency Recovery (BAER) activities, and the presenters agreed that Charter could be activated for that purpose.

Presenters clarified that the Charter Executive Secretariat regularly distributes one-page summaries describing qualified and non-qualified events. Criteria for declaring an emergency under the Charter are regularly reviewed and reevaluated. Participants agreed that NOAA should work with potential affiliated agencies to develop more formal U.S. agreements or MOUs regarding Charter activation processes and criteria for declaring an emergency.

C. Requesting Charter Activation and Data Delivery

The presenters and NOAA representatives outlined a draft process whereby Charter-affiliated Federal agencies could request activation of the Charter on behalf of an end-user. Theoretically, a U.S. requestor would contact the 24-Hour NOAA Satellite Analysis Branch, and SAB duty officers in their capacity as the U.S. Authorized User, would pass the request on to the Charter ECO. The Charter ECO would reply to NOAA SAB within approximately six hours, and NOAA SAB would inform the original requestor of the status of the activation. (Response times and other aspects of this model are still being developed.)

Once data is retrieved from Charter assets, the goal is to convert it into some value-added product. In the past, time delays often meant that the Authorized User did not receive the data in time for it to be useful in coordinating a response to the triggering disaster event. However, in the past six months, the timing has been sufficient to get the final report to the Authorized User in time for the data to be useful.

Data generated under the Charter is currently restricted to use by the end user initiating Charter activation. As a rule, data generated under the Charter is not considered in the public domain, may be protected by copyright, and cannot be transferred to third parties (e.g., scientific researchers). However, presenters indicated that the Charter Executive Secretariat is working on a process whereby all Authorized Users can access data for a given Charter activation.

Additionally, an Authorized User can activate the Charter on behalf of another country, such as developing nation that could not otherwise afford the costs of obtaining the data. For example, the U.S. could invoke the Charter on behalf of Honduras following an earthquake in that country.

In response to a question from Rosalind Helz, presenters clarified that the Charter cannot be activated partially, with users requesting only one type of data from Charter assets. This is not feasible because ECOs work from pre-defined acquisition guidelines to speed acquisition planning and data delivery. However, Project Managers assigned to an activation do have the ability to filter the data received, and if appointed early enough, can work with ECOs to ensure the most appropriate sensor is included in the acquisition plan.

Several people expressed concern about potential over-use of the Charter. Some Charter members (e.g., CNES and the ESA) have annual quotas restricting the

total number of images that can be provided under the Charter for particular satellites (e.g., ERS, ENVISAT, and SPOT).

Ms. Helz asked how the data is collected and managed. The presenters indicated the goal is to handle data electronically through some depository, such as an FTP site. However, this process is still being developed, and certain security and networking concerns need to be addressed.

III. Actions

- GRS to circulate a copy of the presentation (attached).

IV. Announcements

- The presenters announced that a meeting and presentation for potential Charter affiliated Federal agencies will take place at the U.S. Department of Commerce, Hoover Building, on June 3, 2003.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:35pm PM.