KVH TracVision Mobile Satellite TV Antenna Provides Vital Connection During Tornados

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Mobile Reception of the Weather Channel Vital Tool for Tornado Chaser Tim Samaras

MIDDLETOWN, R.I., Jun 6, 2002 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- For anyone who has lived in the Midwest along that band of states known as "Tornado Alley," hearing news reports of a tornado and the ominous wail of warning sirens means that you head for the basement and safety until the storm passes. For Tim Samaras, on the other hand, those reports mean that it's time to go to work. A tornado chaser based in Littleton, Colorado, Tim actively seeks out tornados, hoping to learn more about how they work, how to anticipate them, and how to increase the likelihood that people in a tornado's path can be warned in time to reach safety. To do so, he uses cutting-edge sensor probes and a TracVision LM in-motion satellite TV antenna from KVH Industries (Nasdaq: KVHI) mounted atop his chase vehicle.

"When pursuing a potential or active tornado, we must have up-to-the- minute information about the storm's track and activity," Tim explained. "However, when you are in the middle of Cherry County, Nebraska, the largest county in the country, for example, you can't rely on a cell phone to keep you connected to base and weather reports. Instead, I depend on TracVision LM to keep me connected to the Weather Channel and its tornado coverage. This is the third year I've used TracVision and it has become invaluable to discovering where the tornados are."

Recently featured in the National Geographic Explorer television special, "Into the Tornado," Tim has been chasing tornados for more than 15 years. Tim, the senior research engineer at Applied Research Associates, and his colleagues recently achieved a breakthrough in the science of tornado study with the development and successful deployment of sensor probes designed to study a tornado as it passes overhead.

"We deploy our new probes directly in the path of a tornado," Tim explained. "The probes record changes in barometric pressure, wind speed, and temperature. We also have a similar probe equipped with a video camera so we can potentially take images within the tornado itself. We use this data at Applied Research Associates and also provide it to researchers at universities around the country."

The probes, which are 20 inches in diameter and 6 inches high, are conical in shape and weigh approximately 40 pounds. The probe's shape is designed in such a way that as the wind speed increases, the probe exerts greater pressure on the ground, keeping it firmly anchored. Commenting on the durability of the new sensors, Tim said, "We've tested these probes in wind tunnels with wind speeds of 200 miles per hour and they stayed in place. Of course, when you get a major tornado with winds exceeding 300 miles per hour, all bets are off. A tornado of that magnitude in Jarrell, Texas, on May 27, 1997, peeled the pavement off streets."

To place the probes, it is necessary for Tim and his team to monitor storms, anticipate where a tornado will touch down, and predict how it will travel. The regular tornado reports on the Weather Channel, with its radar overlays and updates every 8 minutes are a vital tool. However, even with this technology, tornado chasers can be surprised by a tornado and find themselves in harm's way.

"During the intercept of the Happy, Texas, tornado on the night of Sunday, May 5, 2002, the tornado turned unexpectedly and we were subjected to winds exceeding 120 miles per hour," Tim related. "Power poles and irrigation pipes were flying around. Three of the windows in the vehicle imploded and the vehicle began to fill with debris. Even through all of that, the TracVision LM mounted on the roof survived perfectly and remained fully operational!"

While the community of tornado chasers is relatively small, Samaras' application demonstrates the ability of the KVH TracVision system to instantly restore connections to the outside world in areas where the local infrastructure has been destroyed. KVH reports that local, state, and federal law enforcement and relief organizations have all fielded TracVision antennas aboard their emergency response vehicles for just this reason.

For more information about Tim Samaras and the tornado research he is conducting with Applied Research Associates, contact Tim Samaras at tsamaras@ecentral.com.

High-resolution, press-ready images of Tim Samaras, his chase vehicle equipped with a TracVision LM, and the deployment of a sensor probe during a tornado, are available to download from the News section of the KVH Industries web site. The direct link is http://www.kvh.com/Press/pr.asp?id=175&category=SATELLITE.

KVH Industries, Inc., designs and manufactures products that enable mobile communication, defense navigation, and direction

sensing through the use of its proprietary mobile satellite antenna and fiber optic technologies. The company is developing next-generation systems with greater precision, durability, and versatility for communications, navigation, and industrial applications. An ISO 9001-registered company, KVH has headquarters in Middletown, Rhode Island, with a fiber optic manufacturing facility in Illinois, and a European sales, marketing, and support office in Hoersholm, Denmark.

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