

Mobile health solutions for crisis response

In the wake of a natural disaster or humanitarian crisis there is often a pressing need for mobile health solutions, such as those manufactured by **Zeppelin Mobile Systeme**. Alexander Lutz, head of sales, explains why the German company's containers, tent systems and vehicle concepts are indispensable in a range of challenging environments.

Can you tell us about the company's background and the mobile room concepts you provide?

Alexander Lutz: Zeppelin Mobile Systeme is a successor of the famous Zeppelin airship company, and therefore looks back on a history of more than 100 years. The shelter business as we know it was launched about 40 years ago. Today we produce and sell all kinds of mobile field-shelter systems, which have applications ranging from communications to medical facilities.

In what situations are mobile hospitals needed?

Mobile hospitals are often desperately needed after a disaster to provide first and immediate response when normal medical infrastructure is damaged or destroyed. This disruption could be the result of human activity or caused by a natural disaster such as an earthquake, tsunami, flood or fire. For example, our field hospitals were used in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Chile and Haiti in 2010. You only have to watch the evening news to find a similar incident somewhere in the world.

What kind of vehicle concepts do you supply?

Theoretically, all of our ground-based systems can also be provided as vehicle-based solutions. The 20ft size is the standard that we use for medical hard shelters, expandable and non-expandable. These can be mounted on any standard truck or trailer platform fitted for this size. With this concept, the customer has the choice of operating the shelter on the ground or mounted on a truck. We also offer a semi-trailer option (40-50ft) as an expandable solution – this concept is particularly suited for use as a stand-alone system, such as a mobile clinic, but should be considered more of a civilian type of product than a military one.

Can you explain the rationale behind the development of your vessel concepts?

The vessel concepts – the ambulance boat, the clinic ship and the floating hospital – have been developed as a direct response to the increasing number of floods we have seen around the world in recent years. These products are equivalent to the land-based medical concepts that we offer, just adapted to the water. In some countries, water roads are often the only available infrastructure that people can use to access medical care.



A Zeppelin mobile clinic on display at MEDICA 2011 in Germany.

What kind of engineering and R&D processes do you have in place?

Zeppelin produces its shelters completely in-house, which means that they are of pure German quality. Our products are subject to a permanent development process. Some people think that logistics products like these do not require much technology, but when you need to develop something that has to function in temperature ranges from -40°C to 60°C and withstand forces of up to 9g during air transport, there is actually quite a lot of know-how involved. Our shelters are developed to have a lifetime of more than 30 years.

How do you ensure that manufacturing standards exceed those typical of industrial production?

This is automatically ensured by the fact that, as a military supplier, we not only have to meet industrial standards such as ISO 9001:2008, but also their much more challenging military equivalents. In addition to that – but also as part of the military requirements – our products undergo severe testing procedures in order to guarantee their performance.

What is distinctive about the sort of customer service you offer? How do you work with your customers to ensure they have the most appropriate product systems installed?

One of our main characteristics – and differences when compared with our competitors – is our experience. The company has existed for a century, and has been a supplier in this sector for 40 years. We don't just claim to be able to do the job, we can also prove it. When I mentioned that

our shelters have a lifetime of 30 years, I wasn't making an unfounded statement. Every year we accept dozens of shelters for refurbishment, shelters that were delivered three decades ago and have been put to use all over the world. In addition, we offer our customers a permanent worldwide service network, and regular maintenance for their systems after the warranty period.

What sort of trends are you seeing in terms of demand for mobile medical systems?

If we're talking about medical applications, the trends are basically set by nature as mentioned previously. You don't have to be a prophet to predict that the frequency of natural disasters will not decrease in the near future. Unfortunately, I have to say that this also applies to man-made catastrophes, including civil wars. I don't know if you can call it a trend, but that kind of development requires a different approach to medical care, or even a turnaround of traditional care.

In the event of a disaster, it is normally impossible to evacuate mass casualties from the site of the incident to stationary hospitals, which could be some distance away. As we know that time is of the essence when it comes to first aid, there is only one solution to the problem: the medical care has to be brought to the people, even by air if necessary. This is what Zeppelin's shelters have been made for.

What challenges do you expect to emerge in the next few years?

The main challenge is very obvious, but it is one for the public sector rather than the industry: governments have to better prepare themselves for disasters than they do today. Consider the Japanese earthquake, tsunami and radiation leak in March 2011; we have to recognise that no country in the world would be adequately prepared for a similar scenario. For example, the number of mobile hospitals that the European Nato countries currently have in stock would not even cover basic medical care. The question is whether it is possible to adequately prepare at all.

The industry cannot be held responsible for the provision, warehousing and managing of such systems, unless it is paid for such duty. The investment that is necessary to procure an adequate number of such logistical support systems – not only hospitals, but also water and power supply systems, and even accommodation – is marginal compared to what is currently raised to save crisis-hit organisations and countries. ■

Further information

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- Large mobile hospital systems with up to 300 patient beds
- Based on advanced Shelter technology acc. to NATO specifications (MIL-STD/STANAG)
- Suitable for the harshest environmental conditions



The Specialists in Military Field Hospitals

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