

Gauteng's disaster management pays off

By Leon Engelbrecht

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Gauteng is getting an early return on investment from its R50 million Disaster Management Centre (DMC), hosted by Continuity SA, in Midrand.

The centre opened in November last year and is currently dealing with its first major disaster: the refugee wave created by xenophobia in several low-income communities.

Colin Deiner, Gauteng's chief director for disaster management and fire services, says the centre has already been running for 17 days and is fulfilling its "command and control" function. "At the moment we are coordinating the relocation of thousands of refugees from police stations," he said this morning.

Deiner says staff levels vary from 15 on a routine day to a peak of 60. He adds that the centre's hardware and software are performing "on spec". A lightning strike last week cost it some redundancy, but the damage has already been fixed, he adds.

Continuity SA business development manager Anthony Askew says the centre is using its systems to "quite a good effect".

"It's playing its part, no question about it. This recent event has helped focused attention on the role of such centres."

The DMC sports a 30Tb data centre loaded with detailed geospatial data and a bank of LCD display screens and clustered workstations, as well as meeting rooms. The "E Team" disaster management software was provided by VirtualAgility, a specialist US vendor, and was used in the aftermath of the 11 September terror attacks, in New York, in 2001.

Deiner says the IT solution "is the first of its kind in SA". Askew adds that even though he is a business continuity expert, he had never before seen software as powerful.

Speaking at its opening last November, Gauteng premier Mbhazima Shilowa said the hi-tech centre would save lives through better coordination and communication.

Other vendors involved in the project included IBM, Dimension Data and Africon.
