

# Alabama's

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# HEALTH

## Department becomes a leader in distance learning capabilities



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Distance learning in the Alabama Department of Public Health reached new heights with the arrival of the department's mobile uplink satellite conference truck.

The first satellite conference using the mobile unit, "Personal Safety in Home Care," was broadcast April 5 from the Southeast Alabama Home Health Training Center in Enterprise, which is under the administration of Kenneth Ball. The studio audience was joined by more than 400 department employees in counties around the state.

One of the advantages of satellite conferencing is that the satellite signal can be received from coast to coast allowing participants in other states to benefit from Alabama's programs. Participants in the April 5 program included viewers in Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska and Utah.

Montgomery television news covered this event, which appropriately fell during Public Health Week. Front page coverage also was provided by the *Enterprise Ledger*, thanks to information provided by Ball and public relations representative Ann Edwards.

Six days later, the department conducted two additional satellite conferences from Montgomery

for county and area employees. The first was a statewide staff meeting to announce the plans for reorganizing public health areas and the new management structure. An estimated 50 sites around the state participated allowing over 1,000 public health employees to hear Dr. Donald Williamson's comments and allow them to ask him questions with a toll-free 1-800 number.

Then in the afternoon another satellite conference presented information about the Home and Community-Based Waiver Program. Approximately 450 employees from Public Health and the Department of Human Resources participated in "satellite receive" sites in 16 locations throughout the state.

In addressing county and area employees, Dr. Williamson commented that he was pleased and excited about the possibilities now available. Compared with the difficulties in scheduling meetings in previous years, Dr. Williamson



Audiovisual specialists Henry Roddam (left) and Julian McLendon (right) are shown inside the satellite truck.





The mobile uplink satellite truck is designed for interactive satellite conference training and education.



said there had been problems with “first, the logistics of finding a suitable time and place,” the costs, and clinic staffing.

Plus over the months it took to conduct all the area meetings, the message often had changed. With the simultaneous broadcast, all corners of the state could hear his message first hand. Questions posed were often the same in all the areas, so needless repetition was avoided and a consistent message could be expressed.

The state health officer said he plans to meet with employees periodically “via satellite conferencing” to update them on the latest departmental information.

Michael Smith, director of the Video Communications Division of the Bureau of Health Promotion and Information, was among those who worked to see this innovative project through to reality over a number of years. He said, “The department is a national leader in utilizing satellite technology for training and education. During the past year, we have been fortunate to have audiovisual specialist Julian McLendon and UAB employee Mack Carmack who together worked in furthering our expertise and capability with satellite conferencing. Together they designed this satellite conferencing truck.”

This satellite conferencing truck is specifically designed for interactive training which allows employees to call in and interact with faculty during programs. In addition to McLendon and Carmack, audiovisual specialist Henry Roddam and division secretary Sandra Blakely work together as a production team to

support department training via satellite.

The interior of the satellite truck resembles a broadcast studio, with numerous pieces of electronic equipment to transmit the program approximately 23,000 miles to a satellite in a geostationary orbit around the earth. The satellite receives the signal and retransmits the program for people to receive over a large geographical area.

During the program people use a regular telephone to call a toll-free number to ask questions or make comments during the satellite conference. The telephone call then becomes transmitted via satellite for all the participating sites to hear.

This month a series of tuberculosis training modules will be broadcast to more than 5,000 viewers (participating from 47 states) nationwide from Enterprise through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded to UAB School of Public Health and the Alabama Department of Public Health. “A Satellite Primer on Tuberculosis” is a continuing education course for entry-level TB workers. As of press time, the department has 27 satellite conferences scheduled through December 1995.

