



August 8, 2004

A consortium consisting of LogicaCMG, Backstream and the foundation Platform Mobile Messaging has been commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Economic affairs to build the world's first government sponsored mobile alert system based on cell broadcast (CB) technology. Cell broadcast, an existing functionality of the GSM technology, makes it possible to provide instructions to citizens in a specific location, for example providing instructions to people to stay inside and close their windows because there is a gas leak.

For this application in the Netherlands, the country has been divided in 5000 cells and information can be broadcasted to each of these cells.

The five Dutch mobile operators have declared that they are willing to implement CB in their networks. This is necessary in order for everyone in the Netherlands to be able to receive a CB message, independent of their chosen mobile operator.

Unlike SMS, with CB the sender does not need to know the mobile phone number of the recipient. A CB message is more like a radio message in that it is broadcasted to a specific cell and anyone in the area with a mobile phone will receive it. Since CB is not limited by network congestion its distribution goes much quicker than sending a SMS message. Within three minutes the message has reached the recipient, regardless of the size of the cell.

The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministries of Transport and Public Works, Internal Affairs and National Health will all work together and will invest EUR 2.5 million to have access to 40 per cent of the CB-system over the next two years. Private sector companies can use the remaining 60 per cent for commercial activities.

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