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Swissphone RE629 pager

Pros

- + Compact size;
- + Backlit LCD display;
- + Impressive battery life;
- + User-friendly PSW629 software;
- + Customize up to 50 different profiles on single device; and
- + Durable case.

Cons

- Lacks external volume control knob.

Swissphone

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Page Me!

Swissphone's RE629 pager offers sophisticated software in a compact, durable case

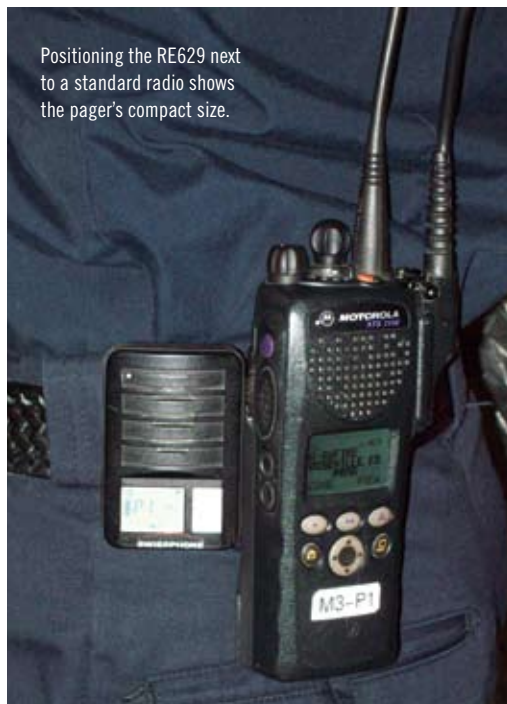
Story & Photos by Neil Sjostrom

I first saw the Swissphone RE629 pager while attending a conference a couple years ago. I was initially attracted to the RE629's LCD display and its compact size—its dimensions are smaller than a credit card. Compared to your average cell phone, the RE629 will compete for less space on your belt—a welcome change from other radio pagers on the market today.

But some of the best benefits of the RE629 lie *within* the pager. These pagers use a profile system that will allow you to customize up to 50 different profiles on a single device. This allows you to design and set up the equivalent of 50 different pagers all within one single device, providing a solution for even the most complex schedule.

The RE629 is equipped with an LCD display that provides quick verification of what profile and alert style you currently have selected. This screen is also backlit, which allows you to make adjustments to the pager's settings in low-light environments. Programmable functions allow you to select the options that will be available. This helps reduce the number of missed alerts and the unnecessary confusion associated with having too many options.

The RE629 provides impressive battery life from a single standard rechargeable AA battery; nearly 7 full days can pass before you see a low-battery indicator on the LCD screen. Longer battery life is a welcome change when it comes to audio pagers. If you're in a pinch, a standard (non-rechargeable) AA battery can be used to prevent you from missing an important alert.



Positioning the RE629 next to a standard radio shows the pager's compact size.

All these features could sell the average user on the product. Additional benefits for the RE629 come when you begin to use the Swissphone PSW629 software to program the pager. This software partners with the Professional Charger base sold by Swissphone, allowing you to connect to your personal computer's serial port.

At first glance, the graphical user interface seems simple; however, it's quite sophisticated. You can program nearly every feature of this pager. Simply click on the green check mark or the red X next to each option to customize the menu. The PSW629 software also allows you to customize the frequency and pattern of the audible alerts. This means you can customize the alert to a tone/pattern that's familiar to help with easily identifying the type of alert being sent by the communication center. This same feature of the PSW629 software allows you to set the pattern for the vibration alert, meaning you can determine what type of alert is coming through the pager even in vibrate mode.

The RE629 is equipped with an LCD display that provides quick verification of what profile and alert style you currently have selected. This screen is also backlit.



Although the ability to adjust these settings is helpful, it wouldn't be practical without the ability to test the alert. The PSW620 programming software allows the user to do just that. Under the services feature you're able to test these alerts when the pager is docked in the charger base.

To top it off, all of these benefits are wrapped together in an extremely durable case. Many of our firefighters use these pagers 24 hours a day. Thus, they must be durable and reliable. I have deployed several of these units to our most active employees. The only issues have been cosmetic issues and are common in all pagers.

Although the RE629 is a great product, it's lacking one item that I've become accustomed to during my pager-carrying years: an external volume-control knob. In order to adjust the volume of the audio transmitted over the speaker, you must navigate the LCD display menu to get to the volume setting. You can change the order of the menu through the programming software, which does help relieve this problem. However, it's still not as easy as having an external knob. I often find myself having to cover the speaker with my hand when I'm in an environment that doesn't permit loud interruptions. The streamlined design, however, does prevent an external volume control knob from being bumped or broken.

Overall, my experience with these pagers has been very positive. I would recommend anyone purchasing audio pagers to evaluate the Swissphone RE629. They are competitively priced at under \$400 for both the pager and standard charger.

Neil Sjoström is a firefighter with the City of Roseville (Minn.) Fire Department. He has been with Roseville for the last 4 years and is currently responsible for all communication equipment for the 75-member department. Sjoström can be reached at neil@hubns.net.

Corrections

In the January Resource Guide, p. 36, we left out the following listing:

Black Chief Officers Committee (BCOC)
PO Box 618171
Orlando, FL 32861-8171
Web: www.blackchiefofficer.com

In the January Gear Test, "Climb on In," p. 14, we printed the incorrect phone number for the Penguin Ice Ladder's manufacturer, Weeb Enterprises. The correct number is 815/861-2625.



News

Vulnerable Vacancies

More foreclosures signals an urgent need for a solid vacant-structure policy

By Jane Jerrard

With the economic downturn and rising numbers of home and business foreclosures, communities across the United States are seeing more and more vacant buildings. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of vacant homes rose to 18.6 million in the first quarter of 2008—5.7 percent higher than the previous year. And as more businesses fold, the number of empty commercial properties is likely to skyrocket as well.

Due to squatters, vandals and neglect, these empty properties mean more fires. Departments across the country are reporting increased numbers of vacant house fires—and often, increased injuries to firefighters as a result. While it's important to contain these fires, departments must handle vacant structure fires effectively while limiting risk to their firefighters.

"Regardless of why a property is vacant—whether it's because of foreclosure or something else—vacant structures create real problems for fire departments," says Russ Sanders, executive secretary of the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Section of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). "This is a very important issue in the fire service; more vacant buildings mean more fire problems and more firefighter safety problems."

HOW'S YOUR POLICY?

Does your fire department follow a specific, detailed policy for approaching vacant structures? "Every department should have a policy," Sanders says. "[And for those that do], it's a question of to what extent they stress the policy."

Review your department's vacant-structure policy and check it against some expert advice. Sanders points out that, "There is guidance in the NFPA codes for developing these policies and procedures. NFPA 1: Fire Code has an entire chapter on this, starting with how the property must be properly boarded up and secured." You can also review the textbook that Sanders co-authored with Bernard Klaene, "Structural Firefighting: Strategy and Tactics" (Jones & Bartlett, 2007), which is available through NFPA.

INSPECT & PLAN

The key to coping with fires in vacant buildings is to do all your homework on a building before it burns.

"Do the inspections," Sanders urges. "Go look at the property—especially empty commercial properties—and know if there's an open elevator shaft or an ►