

## Build a do-it-yourself wireless throw phone for \$20

By Sam Hicks, Rescue Phone®

I've been designing and supplying hostage negotiator telephone systems for over thirty years. Not surprisingly, I get a lot of phone calls asking "Do you have..." or "Wouldn't it be neat if..." and "Have you thought of...". One question that pops up on a regular basis is "Do you sell a wireless throw phone?"

I have always resisted the urge to design such a phone because of several basic problems a wireless throw phone would encounter. Call it Sam's Law:

*All wireless throw phones use batteries, the batteries will wear down and fail over time and that failure will occur at the worst possible time.*

At Rescue Phone, we have spent the last year developing our new Cellular Response Console™ for the FBI and we did a great deal of research on cell phones available to the public. In the process we uncovered the perfect solution for a low-cost wireless throw phone and I have finally learned to embrace the concept. In fact, I now see that some issues that I thought were faults may actually be beneficial to law enforcement.

I like the idea so much that I want to share the simple steps you can take to do it yourself, and I will also point out that this will work for any negotiations team, even those using products from our competitors.

### How to build it

For best results you will need two relatively inexpensive items that are well within the budget of even the most cash-strapped agency:

1. **A cell phone.** Sometimes one can be found in your department's recovered property room and assigned to your Crisis Negotiations Unit. If that's not possible, most cellular carriers have a free, or al-

most free, basic handset with a minimum of features. The more basic, the better. The trick here is to find one that you can program to receive incoming calls but be locked if the user tries to make an outgoing call. If you have to purchase one or add it to your existing contract, just make sure it will function as I described above. Most manufacturers have a number of models with this feature. We use the LG VX8300. If you get a phone with the same carrier that your department uses, you may be able to take advantage of free and unlimited mobile-to-mobile calls. Then, if negotiations run for hours and hours, at least you're not paying by the minute.

2. **A delivery mechanism.** I suggest a clear-top Pelican 1020 Micro Case. It's tough, see-through, guaranteed for life and reasonably priced around \$20. The 1020 size fits most current cellular handsets. Just put a small piece of foam in the bottom, load the handset and point to the window that you want your tactical team to throw it through.

With the package delivered, you are ready to use your cell phone or any



Top: Pelican case pre-modification  
Bottom: Pelican case after-modification

### LG phone security code procedure to lock outgoing calls





landline phone to call the barricaded area. The throw phone's number is known only to you so the media can't use the reverse directory and dial up the bad guy.

Can the bad guy unlock it and make outgoing calls? No, he can only receive calls. There is only one number he can dial: 9-1-1. And if he does, your emergency call center can simply forward the call to your location. Bad guy connected equals mission accomplished.

Locking and unlocking the phone is quite simple. On most phones, go to the settings and tools menu, select phone settings, then security. The phone will prompt you to enter the lock code, which is typically the last four digits of the phone's number. After you enter the number it will prompt you to enter the lock mode, then either lock or unlock the phone.

Be sure to test the handset by trying to dial any phone number. If it is locked, the call will not go through. Now the bad guy can only receive phone calls from you. Don't worry about the bad guy guessing the unlock code; there are 10,000 different combinations for him to try (and fail).

## Battery awareness

Getting back to Sam's Law, in time you will get a feel for how long the cell phone's battery will last. You will need to tell the bad guy that you have a hard-wired phone that you can have delivered about a half hour before you anticipate the battery will fail or anytime you think the bad guy would be willing to accept it. This allows your tactical team the opportunity to deliver the throw phone with all of the fancy features we have grown to love and find so helpful.

## Finishing touches

- Use a label maker to put a "Lift Here" sticker in a bright color on the flaps.
- If you want to send in a body mic you can purchase a slightly larger Micro Case and fit it with a false bottom to conceal the covert equipment.
- A few holes drilled through the clear plastic top will help the bad guy hear the ringer when you call. Don't make the holes too big; a couple of small holes are better than one big one. Start with a pilot hole and drill slowly to protect the clear plastic top.

Crashing a throw phone through a window should not be your first choice for establishing contact with a barricaded gunman. However, this nifty little gadget is both practical and inexpensive and should be one more tool in your team's bag of tricks that can be used when necessary. ◀◀

## About the author

**Sgt. Sam Hicks (ret.)** is a 23-year veteran of the Prince George's County, Md. Police Department. In 1980, he graduated from a two-week training course in Hostage Negotiations and was shortly afterwards appointed as the department's first Hostage and Barricade Communications Specialist certified under Maryland law. He is the founder of Rescue Phone, Inc. and over the years has provided negotiator telephones and training for numerous state and local departments as well as federal agencies including the FBI, ATF, DHS and over 25 foreign countries through the U.S. Department of State.

## State Crisis Negotiation Associations

- Arkansas Crisis Negotiators Association
- California Association of Hostage Negotiators
- Delaware Valley Negotiators Association
- East Bay Hostage Negotiator Association
- Florida Association of Hostage Negotiators
- Illinois Crisis Negotiators Association
- Indiana Assoc. of Hostage/Crisis Negotiators
- Kansas Association of Hostage Negotiators
- Louisiana Association of Crisis Negotiators
- Michigan Association of Hostage Negotiators
- Midwest Crisis Negotiators
- New England Crisis Negotiators Association
- National Council of Negotiations Associations
- New Jersey Association of Crisis Negotiators
- New York Association of Hostage Negotiators
- Ohio Crisis Negotiators Association
- Pittsburgh Area Negotiation Association
- Rocky Mountain Hostage Negotiator Assoc.
- San Diego County Hostage Negotiator Assoc.
- Santa Clara Hostage Negotiator Association
- South Carolina Crisis Negotiators Association
- Texas Association of Hostage Negotiators
- Tri County SWAT & Hostage Negotiators Assoc.
- Virginia Negotiators Association
- Western Pennsylvania Negotiators Association
- Western States Hostage Negotiators Assoc.
- Wisconsin Crisis Negotiators Association

For links and contact information for these associations, visit the Crisis Negotiations section of our Web site at [www.ntoa.org](http://www.ntoa.org). ◀◀