



Reporting to you live ...

A look at a newsroom on wheels

BY KRIS CORONADO

The white Ford E-350 before Erik Lee is no ordinary automobile: It has a small broadcast dish on the roof.

The TV news van is one of five belonging to local CBS affiliate WUSA 9, where Lee is chief photographer. Since the 1980s, vehicles such as these have been media mainstays, allowing reporters and photographers to bring live audio and video from the field to viewers at home. "We drive these things a ton," Lee says. "They often can work 21 hours out of 24."

Capturing and broadcasting breaking news as it happens, however, isn't merely a matter of pulling up on a curb and flipping a switch. Lee gives us the scoop on how this high-tech office-on-wheels works.



A photographer and reporter share the **work space** inside. A reporter can record voice-overs using the microphone and edit stories on a laptop. The camera records on tape, though the station soon will use digital SD cards, says Erik Lee, above.



A seven-kilowatt gas **generator** powers the truck's electric equipment. "Maintaining this generator is critical to us, because we lose the news operations of this truck if it fails," Lee says.



The **mast** can be raised and lowered with hand-held controls. It can reach its full height (56 feet, Lee estimates) in about two minutes; older models can take as long as eight minutes — "agonizing if you're on a breaking story," Lee says.

This **microwave truck** broadcasts signals to one of three digital towers in the area, which relay those signals to the "9 News Now" studios in upper Northwest Washington.

The station has four microwave trucks and one digital satellite truck. Microwave broadcasts are cheaper: "You're paying by the minute" to use a satellite, Lee says. The station broadcasts on **one frequency**, which "costs us nothing other than" taking the van to the site.



The back of the van contains about **800 feet of cable**, used for microphones and video cameras that feed into the van, as well as power cables.

The van weighed 8,000 pounds before it was outfitted with equipment. Now it comes in at a little less than **10,000 pounds**, Lee says.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BENJAMIN C. TANKERSLEY