

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT | CITIES OF NEDERLAND AND PORT NECHES, TEXAS

Standing up to the Storm: How two police departments used technology to stay connected during Hurricane Harvey

In the weeks leading up to the 2017 hurricane season, Chief Darrell Bush of the Nederland Police Department and Chief Paul Lemoine of the Port Neches Police Department participated in one storm preparation meeting after another, but none of it could have prepared them for what would happen once Hurricane Harvey made landfall in late August.

In just five days, the City of Nederland, Texas, broke national records after 64.58 inches of rain drenched the community — 31.38 inches of which came down in a single day. Port Neches, Texas, wasn't too far behind, receiving 64.51 inches of rainfall during the same time frame.

"I'll tell you that in a situation like that, you have manuals to go by and you have protocol, but the bottom line is that the actual situation is going to be different, and there is really no way to be proactive except to make sure that the software you're using and any equipment you are going to depend on is good and reliable," Bush said.

A Critical Connection

Located just around 30 miles off the coast of Texas, between Houston and the Louisiana border, the neighboring communities of Nederland and Port Neches are so close together that it is often difficult to tell where one city ends and the other begins. The proximity between the two communities plus a third nearby city has allowed a unique partnership to form in which the local law enforcement entities rely on each other for basic services, including police dispatch.

Because all three municipalities are utilizing Incode[®] Public Safety software, information flows seamlessly between each of the jurisdictions, Bush said.

This connection became a critical component of the police departments' response during Hurricane Harvey.

On a typical day, three dispatch operators working out of a unit located at the Nederland Police Department are responsible for answering and routing 911 calls for each of the three cities. However, five operators were brought in just to manage the number of calls coming through during Hurricane Harvey.

In just a 12-hour period, the cities' dispatchers answered more than 3,200 calls — the average on a normal day is around 60 to 70 calls.

"We all had houses that had flooded, and we were all actively doing water rescues for several hours at a time, and we were being inundated with rescue requests. We really relied on our dispatchers to relay that information to keep us from wasting time and continually moving forward," Lemoine said. "It was the middle of the night. We were up to our necks in water, getting in and out of boats, so it was really a lifesaver for us."

This was Lemoine's fourth hurricane with the Port Neches Police Department, and, in his experience, communication is always critical to the success of the operation. In fact, his department has faced the challenges of technology that couldn't keep up during previous storms. With no way to take outside calls, officers had previously been forced to rely on word-of-mouth communication, he said. Flooding neighborhoods with volunteers and officers going door-to-door was necessary to ensure everyone got the help they needed.

Overview

Rainfall:

Nederland: 64.58 inches
(broke national record)

Port Neches: 64.51 inches

Number of Calls:

3,130 above average during
Hurricane Harvey

Total Number of Rescues:

180 lives

Location: Central Texas

Tyler Solution:

Incode[®] Public Safety CAD

In Their Own Words:

"There is really no way to be proactive except to make sure that the software you're using and any equipment you are going to depend on is good and reliable"

— Chief Darrel Bush
Nederland Police Department,
Texas

But, not this time.

“We never lost our communication this time, and that was really a big deal,” he said.

“Maintaining that was just a win. Even as chaotic as it was, it kept it a smooth chaos.”

A Reliable Partner

During Hurricane Harvey, dispatchers were able to create a checklist for officers wading through the water in search of stranded citizens so time wasn't lost on unnecessary tasks.

“We were in people's houses, and up to our waists in water, looking for people, and all of their belongings were just floating by us,” Lemoine said. “We were having to try to get into cars that were underwater and make sure that no one was in there and all that kind of stuff.”

Still, despite everything going on around him, Lemoine said he never worried about whether the department's technology was standing up to the storm as long as he and his officers were able to get the information they needed to save lives.

“I was in the field the whole time. It was all hands on deck,” Lemoine said. “All I know is that [our software] was working.”

When the rain stopped, the sun finally reappeared, and the flooding started to recede, the two police departments had made a combined total of more than 180 rescues. Empowered with timely, accurate information and a connection that lasted through the storm, no lives were lost in Nederland or Port Neches and no officer was injured in the field.

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