



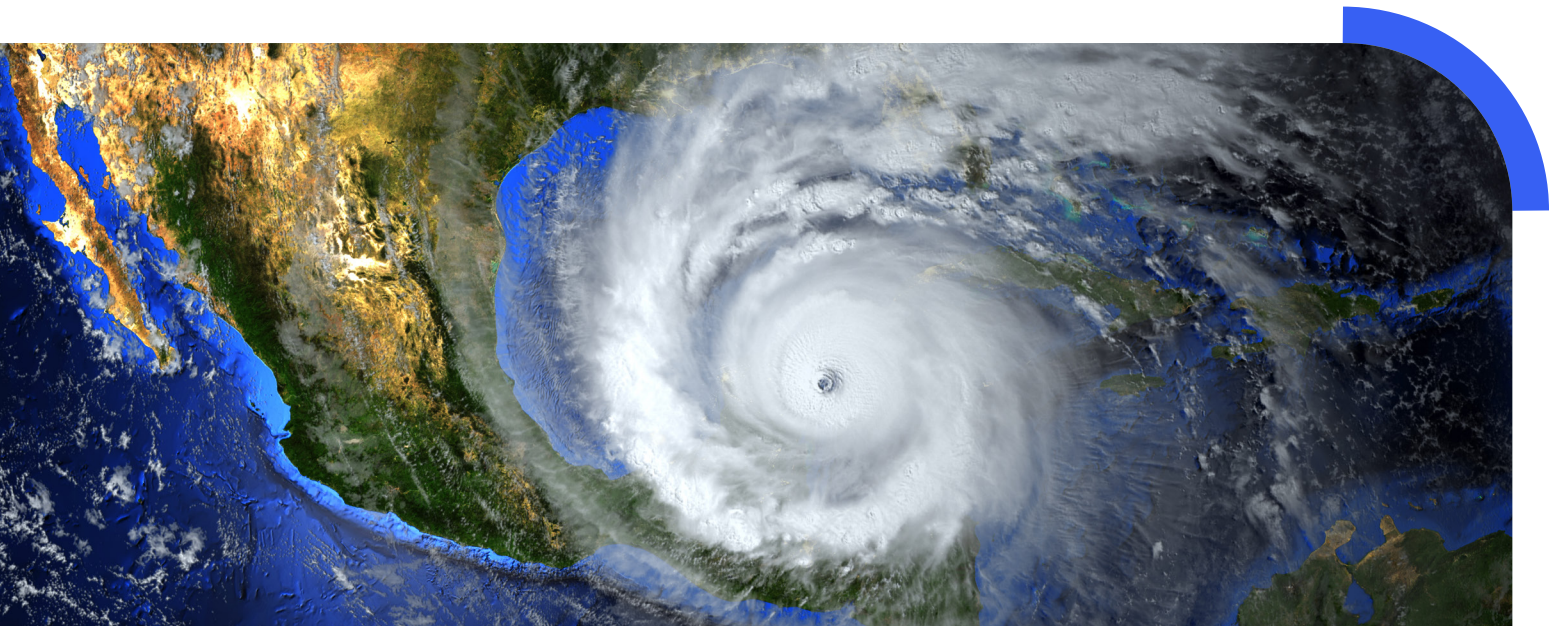
Bay County Improves Resident Outreach During Severe Weather Events with Everbridge Resident Connection

Bay County is located in the northwest corner of Florida, an area prone to severe weather due to its close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. The population is roughly 175,000 across seven cities and over a dozen communities.

The Bay County Emergency Management Division is responsible for performing technical work in the development, implementation, and management of countywide disaster prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation.

Highlights

- After Hurricane Michael devastated the area in 2018, the county began using Everbridge Resident Connection to target residents and provide access to temporary shelters, meals, and supplies in the recovery phase.
- During one of the largest wildfires in Florida history, Bay County used Resident Connection to alert the public of law enforcement activity, inaccessible areas, and areas facing possible evacuation as the wildfire spread.



Challenges

Bay County, FL, was continuously challenged with finding a streamlined way to communicate with residents and tourists before, during, and after severe weather events. Their challenges ranged from difficulty in notifying their residents in the aftermath of a hurricane to the daily shift in notifications as a wildfire was in progress.

Following the effects of Hurricane Michael, Bay County was unable to reach residents with cell towers down and landlines uprooted. Some of the most basic recovery efforts were damaged by the “sledgehammer” approach in communications, as Frank E. Lumm, Emergency Management Division Chief for the county, described, in which blanket notices were sent out to all residents. Lumm, explained that what followed was overcrowded relief facilities and alerts being sent to people who were not in the immediate target area of the county.

A similarly urgent and evolving situation happened in March 2022, when a wildfire consumed large portions of the county. Lumm and his team needed a tool that would not only target specific groups with important notifications, but also quickly pivot to reach different segments of the population as the fire grew and shifted positions overnight.



“It’s an invaluable tool. We can specifically pick out where we want to send information and what exact information we want to send to particular groups.”

“On a moment’s notice, we were actually training someone live during a wildfire in the command vehicle that had not used the product to that extent. They put her as the primary person for notifications, and we immediately got the Everbridge team on the phone.”

FRANK E. LUMM
Emergency Management Division
Chief, Bay County, FL

Solution

For Bay County, the solution was Everbridge Resident Connection. During severe weather events, Bay County uses Resident Connection to streamline notifications to the right groups and quickly alert residents and visitors of law enforcement activity, relief locations, and evacuation efforts. In the case of the wildfire, Lumm said they relied heavily on Resident Connection because of how much the fire was moving. “It’s not like a barricaded shooter or active shooter situation,” Lumm said. Lumm and his team were able to draw a polygon around the area experiencing active law enforcement activity and send notifications to people instructing them to stay away from that area.

Lumm’s team additionally utilizes Resident Connection features to move the alerting area on a map, allowing them to communicate to residents when it is safe to return to their communities. Similarly, after Hurricane Michael, Bay County used a targeted approach to convey messages to specific populations without an all-encompassing approach. “It is vital for us because once you evacuate folks, their biggest concern is being able to get back in” he added.

For residents still facing displacement and disruption, Resident Connection gave Lumm’s team the extra edge of providing community members with a unique administration number. The number was the go-to resource for residents to call with specific questions, while also providing information on rest locations with donations and meals for displaced residents.

In addition, hospitals, schools, police, and fire organizations all tied together and shared messaging. “We’re not cross-pollinating messaging and contradicting each other as things move across the county,” Lumm said.

Another critical component of Resident Connection was its user-friendliness, making it easy to communicate situations like boil water notices, neighborhood robberies, flag warnings at the beach, and other urgent matters with customizable and pre-scripted notice options

Thanks to Everbridge’s robust training, Bay County is able to onboard new users with ease, ensuring that a trained support professional is ready to help whenever a critical event occurs. “The whole training itself took about a week, but that was broken up into different groups throughout the whole period. Each group spent anywhere between three to four hours learning all the different little tricks” Lumm explained.

Advice from Bay County

Bay County's use of Everbridge was the financial responsibility of the state of Florida. After several years, the state decided to let individual counties choose if they wanted to continue using the platform, and make a statewide purchase in cases of emergencies. Lumm and the Emergency Management Division discussed their plans and knew they wanted to continue using Resident Connection. "It was about a five minute conversation with my team, we absolutely wanted this program," Lumm said. They leaned on their prior experience and expertise with disasters in their area, plus their successful use of Resident Connection, to continue with the platform for the benefit of their team and their population. They reached out to surrounding counties to ask what they thought of the Everbridge tools, and the consensus was that they would all continue using it. Through a grant available to them, they continued use of Everbridge and never actually interrupted service. "We were blessed to have that grant available, and it is now part of my budget moving forward. It is an invaluable tool," Lumm stated.

State and federal grants are available, although it may differ by location. Lumm explained some are geared toward emergency services, emergency management responders, opportunities to purchase equipment, trainings, and other services.

Even though the grants could help fund use of Resident Connection, as Lumm explained, it's vital to understand the scope of usage at a county level, state level, and beyond, "What would you use it for? What groups are you trying to reach out to? And what would the tool do for you?"