



Jefferson County, Alabama, leans on Everbridge for resilience amid frequent tornadoes

Jefferson County, Alabama, is the most tornado-prone county in a state where these natural disasters often pose life-threatening circumstances. As the state's most populous county, their Emergency Management Agency uses Everbridge to facilitate the difficult task of alerting over 670,000 residents of impending danger to protect them before, during, and after a tornado.

Highlights

- During a devastating evening tornado in January 2021, Jefferson County was able to send over **60,000 alerts** via Everbridge before tornado sirens activated.
- Jefferson County uses Everbridge to quickly and accurately communicate road closures and the best routes to get to those in need.



Challenges

One of the most serious challenges for Jefferson County was their reliance on an outdated siren system that was not fast enough to deploy, nor could they reach all residents. Before implementing Everbridge, some areas of the county were difficult to reach with sirens due to their hilly landscape, and power outages or structural damage could easily impair the siren nearest to any given community.

These challenges were further exacerbated when it came to sudden tornadoes that occur overnight. “Think about the problems that are unique to having tornado warnings at night,” Coker said. “Can you hear the warning sirens if you’re asleep? Can you hear them if there’s wind?” Tornado sirens also rotate, sometimes slowly, so in urgent situations, residents simply may not have the time to wait for it to rotate enough to reach everyone who needs to hear it.

In the case of very fast-developing storms, Coker explained that they just don’t have enough time to get warnings out to potentially save lives, and they could have major issues with accessibility to help those affected if the storm ravages roads and highways. “One of our goals as emergency managers is to give you enough time to make a decision that may save your or your family’s life,” he said.



“We have 255 sirens that cover over 1,100 square miles in Jefferson County, but the system is inadequate, so we had to have other options. Everbridge is our go-to option because it offers so many different ways to contact the public.”

Jim Coker

Director of Jefferson County EMA



Solutions

During a 2021 tornado, which combined the worst-case scenarios of being extremely fast-developing and happening at night, Coker's team used Everbridge to deploy an alert to over 60,000 contacts using an interactive map that outlines a geographic area where all residents need to be reached.

"The sirens do activate, but they don't activate as quickly as an Everbridge notification goes out," Coker said. With Everbridge notifications, they reach everyone in their database with the map functionality, but there could be cases where residents without compatible devices, or those who may have turned them off at night, cannot be reached. By alerting everyone within the necessary boundaries, those who were missed can still be alerted by neighbors or families who are taking action.

Because of the damage caused by these storms and the urgency with which emergency crews need to act, Jefferson County also uses Everbridge to communicate information about roadblocks and best ways to get to those in need. "Every storm, we learn another way to best use tools that we have. Because we have Everbridge married into everything we do, as soon as we receive information, we can push that back out to the public via social media, for example," Coker said.

Their team now employs someone to monitor their social channels during an event, because call-ins have dwindled and most of their residents are looking to their mobile devices for updates, including what to do if in danger, or for damage reports after a storm. The county relies on social media to give them rapid damage reports, which they then push out on the messaging platform and alert roads and transportation crews, public works, and 911 centers.

Coker also confirmed that to accomplish their goal of reaching every resident, their team needs to be able to deploy messages in different languages and dialects. They are creating templates within Everbridge that ensure messages are sent out in multiple languages, and perfected with the right wording for different dialects. The county is currently in the process of having those templates reviewed by experts to reach every community appropriately. The hearing-impaired community also benefits from text alerts from Everbridge, as well as social media posts with corresponding graphics, replacing calls or sirens as the main warning.

With Everbridge on their side, Jefferson County now knows that during an emergency, they can reach every resident on the platforms they use and, in a language and format they're familiar with.



"Being able to have Everbridge, which will continue to function no matter what, is lifesaving."

Jim Coker
Director of Jefferson County EMA



About Everbridge

Everbridge, Inc. (NASDAQ: EVBG) empowers enterprises and government organizations to anticipate, mitigate, respond to, and recover stronger from critical events. In today's unpredictable world, resilient organizations minimize impact to people and operations, absorb stress, and return to productivity faster when deploying critical event management (CEM) technology. Everbridge digitizes organizational resilience by combining intelligent automation with the industry's most comprehensive risk data to Keep People Safe and Organizations Running™.

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