VISION™

Emergency Management
Case Study

Local Gov Websites Play Critical Role Before, During and After Hurricane Matthew

Affected communities relied on their mobile-responsive websites to seamlessly communicate crucial information to displaced residents.

Days after Hurricane Matthew made landfall on the South Carolina coast on October 8, 2016, blue skies across the region belied the destruction that was yet to come. Normally tranquil rivers swelled to record heights in many areas, causing unprecedented flooding nearly a week after the hurricane had passed. Municipal and county government leaders in the area would be dealing with the aftermath and cleanup for months to come.
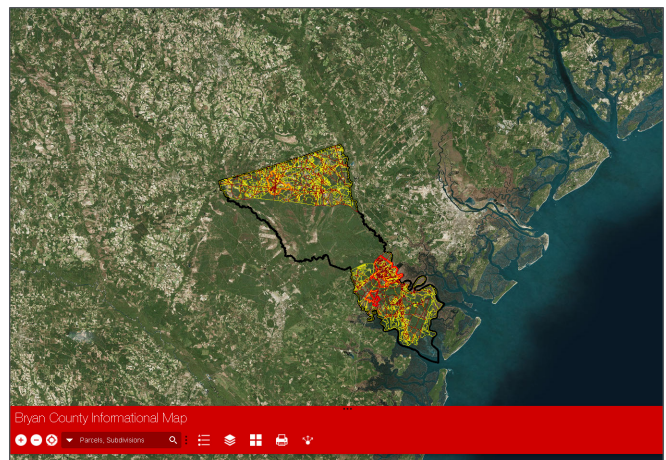
All told, Hurricane Matthew has been blamed for at least 39 deaths across five states. For three Vision clients in the Southeastern United States, their local government websites proved to be lifelines, delivering critical emergency management information that no doubt prevented further injuries and loss of life before, during and after the storm. Here are their stories.

"The responsive design functionality of our new website, which allows it to translate well onto any device, was very useful," said Brian Conley, IT manager for Bryan County. "In a hurricane situation, probably 80 to 90 percent of the people are going to use their cell phones to access our website and social media for updates."

In the aftermath of the storm, Bryan County used teams of volunteers, assessors and even a drone to take photos of hurricane-related damage. The drone photographed areas that were inaccessible due to flooding, fallen trees and downed power lines. Images were uploaded to an online interactive "**Hurricane Matthew Damage Application**" GIS map of the county, which displayed a dot for each area in need of recovery funding and cleanup assistance.

Bryan County, Georgia

Just two months before Hurricane Matthew threatened its community, Bryan County went live with its new Vision website and invited local residents and businesses to subscribe to news alerts. What began as a news advisory about a voluntary evacuation order for the South End of Bryan County on Oct. 5, escalated to an urgent call for mandatory countywide evacuations by the next evening. When the hurricane passed offshore on Oct. 7, schools were closed, inland shelters were activated and a flash flood warning was issued.

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"The interactive hurricane damage map is getting a lot of use," Conley said. "Insurance companies are using it, as are Federal and State emergency management agencies. Recovery work teams are using it to identify areas that need clean up. I'm so glad we had our new site online before this hit. The value of having an up-to-date site with mobile-friendly responsive design before, during and after a hurricane emergency is huge. I don't think people would have been able to find the information they needed with our old site. It was not at all mobile-friendly, so the GIS map would not have been accessible from a mobile phone."

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>
> **Brian Conley**
> IT Manager
> Bryan County

Clay County, Florida

Clay County, Florida encourages all new residents and businesses to visit its website to register for the **Alert Clay County** public notification system to receive alerts about severe weather and other emergencies via email or text message. These alerts point people back to the website's Emergency Management section, which contains a wealth of information including what to pack, where to go and how to plan during an evacuation. This information was vital to promoting emergency preparedness, assuring responsiveness and achieving recovery following Hurricane Matthew.

A color-coded **Hurricane Evacuation and Shelter Map** showed residents where to go for shelter during the storm and identified shelters that accommodate special needs and are pet-friendly.

Weeks after the hurricane, Clay County's homepage continued to prominently display news on an extended Local State of Emergency.

Wilmington, North Carolina

An eye-catching, impossible-to-miss emergency hurricane banner near the top of the City of Wilmington's homepage was posted during the first days of October to warn residents of the incoming storm. With one-click, they could access a series of practical and essential Storm Preparation Tips. By October 5th, a bright yellow banner stating "City declares state of emergency for Hurricane Matthew" appeared at the top of every page on the city website. According to Malissa Talbert, Wilmington's communications officer, residents "definitely looked to the website" for hurricane-related information.

"During the storm, we approached our communications in two ways," said Talbert. "We put information about Hurricane Matthew front and center on our website homepage to make it easy to find. We also pushed information out via Twitter and Facebook, and drove people back to the website with links to storm-related updates. The social media integration feature, which was part of the new Vision website we launched in July, was critical to enhancing our ability to communicate."

Talbert predicted it would take the City of Wilmington at least two months to clean up the hurricane debris; But internal feedback on how the new website performed during the storm came much faster. "My content managers and super users reported that it's much easier and quicker to make updates on the fly, and the ability to do it remotely is a huge plus," said Talbert. "Both of those things come into play in any emergency situation; and it certainly held true during Hurricane Matthew."

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