

Putting power in the hands of the people with an emergency information app

The challenge

Indiana's Hancock County experiences a range of severe weather conditions throughout the year. Tornadoes in the spring, severe thunderstorms and flooding during the summer months, and snow and ice in the winter.

"We have everything and anything in between," said Greg Duda, public information officer/school safety liaison at the Hancock County 911 Center. "We have heat indices like hundred plus and then we're also getting below zero windchills."

Hancock County is located within the Indianapolis metropolitan area, and includes the city of Greenfield, the towns of McCordsville and Fortville, and the townships of Buck Creek, Sugar Creek and Vernon. The county has about 80,000 residents.

"It's a very commuter-dependent county," Duda said. "Everyone lives here but works outside of here. They're traveling to Indianapolis or going somewhere else, but they're coming back home. Everyone leaves at different times, but everyone is coming back home at the same time. This is why we stay on top of the alerts, especially with traffic."



Customer

Approximately 4,000 residents receive tornado alerts, 3,400 residents get blizzard alerts, and 2,800 residents are signed up for heat-related advisories.

Challenges Solved

- 9-1-1 Response
- Severe Weather Emergencies

Solutions

- The Rave Platform

The solution

Administrators in Hancock County send alerts through Rave's critical communication solution designed to operate in emergency and nonemergency situations. Messages can be sent out in a matter of seconds simultaneously through text, email, voice calls, social media, IPAWS, digital signage and desktop alerts — all through a single launch point.

The Rave platform includes a text to opt-in feature, which allows residents to sign up for traffic, weather or other alerts by texting a unique keyword to a short code.

John Jokantas, director of the Hancock County 911 Center, said administrators just started to use the feature for traffic alerts and it's been "successful."

The Hancock County 911 Center is a consolidated regional center with 25 dispatchers for about 20 public and nonpublic safety agencies. They include the Hancock County Highway Department, the Hancock County Sheriff's Department, the police departments in Greenfield, Fortville and McCordsville, and the fire departments in Buck Creek, Greenfield and Sugar Creek. The center also assists with Hancock County's animal control department and the coroner's office.

The county transitioned to the Rave platform in 2017 to allow 9-1-1 teams and first responders to better handle, dispatch and respond to emergencies more effectively and efficiently. While also leveraging crowdsourced data through residents' personal safety profiles that may include their address, the names and pictures of family members, medical history and transportation or mobility limitations.

Hancock County's schools also added the Rave Panic Button mobile app to instantly connect school staff with 9-1-1 and simultaneously notify faculty and staff on campus about an emergency in a single click.

Jokantas had previously used Rave's critical communication solution at another agency and wanted to add both the 9-1-1 response and safety & protection solutions when the time came to switch from the county's existing alerting system.

"It made it easier for me to talk about [Rave] to the other agencies that were involved in making this decision," Jokantas said.

For Duda, communication and simplicity were important factors.

"We needed to know how to get a message out to a lot of people, while easily setting it up here," he said. "Any of the dispatchers on any of the consoles can send out an alert. You don't have to have special permission or training. All they have to do is log in and send out an alert within a minute. That's what we wanted, something easy like that."

The Hancock County 911 Center and Sheriff's Department are some of the agencies that use Rave for both external and internal messaging.



"Through the combination of the tornado sirens and the National Weather Service alerting through Rave, everybody gets notified. There's a hundred different ways for people to get notified. Our alerts are obviously going to be the most detailed because they're coming directly from the National Weather Service."

John Jokantas
Director, Hancock County 911 Center

The result

Adding Rave has helped the Hancock County 911 Center keep the county's residents informed and updated about various weather events.

"One third of our county is suburban and the other two thirds are rural," Jokantas said. "Weather generally moves west to east, so our population centers usually get nailed first."

Residents have opted in to receive specific alerts, which is one of the key features of Rave's platform that helps avoid alert fatigue within the community and make sure people are receiving the critical information they need and want. About 4,000 residents receive tornado alerts, 3,400 residents are signed up for blizzard alerts, and 2,800 residents get heat-related advisories. The county's Facebook page also has about 11,000 followers.

These alerts are in addition to customized weather notifications that Rave sends out through IPAWS, text, voice and social media. These notifications are tied to the National Weather Service and based on weather in the area.

Through a social media integration, "they post automatically to our Facebook page and it gives me feedback about how many people are also getting these alerts through Facebook. It lets me know what's actually getting out there," Duda said.

Jokantas added the tornado warnings are also automatic through Rave.

"Our emergency management department put a lot of effort into the tornado sirens over the last few years, but those are great for outside," he said. "Through the combination of the tornado sirens and the National Weather Service alerting through Rave, everybody gets notified."

"There's a hundred different ways for people to get notified," Jokantas continued. "Our alerts are obviously going to be the most detailed because they're coming directly from the National Weather Service."

Hancock County recently experienced a severe thunderstorm while Duda was working a shift.

"We didn't really know that we were targeted. We thought it was going to pass us, but it didn't," he said. "We got a lot of rain in less than an hour and it almost went to flash flood status too. It was crazy."

"My phone went off and so did everyone else that I was working with because we're all signed up," Duda continued. "I think I got a total of three messages within an hour. Getting the alerts is the nice part and they automatically tell you what time it's going to happen. It's helpful."



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