

Disaster Recovery in Oklahoma

Steve Towns | June 26, 2013

As this issue of *Government Technology* goes to press, communities in Oklahoma are recovering from a devastating series of tornadoes that struck in late May. Entire neighborhoods were leveled, more than 30 people lost their lives, and many more lost their homes and belongings.

The tragic events once again showed how technology can be critical to emergency response and recovery efforts. The state of Oklahoma quickly launched a disaster relief portal with interactive maps showing damaged areas and the location of aid resources. In addition, the site — dubbed OKStrong — includes tools to help residents recover lost pets and find irreplaceable items like family photographs and other keepsakes.

“This is one of those things that IT can do to be of assistance to those who have suffered loss as well as to those who are trying to bring help,” Oklahoma state CIO Alex Pettit told *Government Technology*.

OKStrong leveraged the same infrastructure as Oklahoma’s OK.gov state government portal, allowing the new site to be created rapidly. Still, the state portal’s 22-person staff worked around the clock to launch OKStrong and expand it, said Mark Mitchell, general manager of OK.gov, which is operated by NIC subsidiary Oklahoma Interactive.

“We utilized our local content management system and initially launched the site with a handful of informational pages,” he said. “From there, it grew into an information source where donation centers and shelter information were available.”

According to local news reports, the area also got a boost from recovers.org, an organization that matches volunteer resources and donations to disaster-area needs. Recovers.org for Moore, one of the Oklahoma communities devastated by the storms, shows a long list of available volunteers and materials, along with relief information. It also has posts seeking everything from paper plates and batteries to trucks for hauling away debris.

As Oklahoma residents struggle to recover, we keep them in our hearts, and we once again remember the importance of good technology and good partners when disaster strikes.

<http://www.govtech.com/public-safety/Disaster-Recovery-in-Oklahoma.html>