

Zuercher CAD: Proven Performance During Disaster

Major weather events and natural disasters create a perfect storm of demands for first responders. Communications centers are often the first to feel the strain as people begin calling for help. Citizens in crisis start dialing 9-1-1, tying up resources at your PSAP. And disasters are a test of your standard processes, systems, and employees—sometimes uncovering problems in procedures that work well under normal situations.

The Oconee County Sheriff's Office in South Carolina is accustomed to severe weather operations, regularly handling severe thunderstorms and ice precipitation events that can instantly fill their queues with calls. However, when Hurricane Irma passed over the county in September 2017, the agency's dispatch center tested their CAD system performance in a new way.

Case Study: Zuercher CAD during Hurricane Irma

Dispatchers at Oconee County E911 regularly deal with winter ice storms that cause short-term spikes in their workload. When the power goes out, the phones get busy.

"We deal with trees down in power lines causing fires, calls to go out and help people who are trapped, homes with vulnerable residents with special medical needs who need power to stay alive, and still you have the day-to-day calls for service, the fights, and the property crimes," said Captain Travis Tilson, commander of Oconee County E911.

The dispatch center has been using Zuercher CAD since 2015, when the sheriff's office went live with a full Zuercher Suite system. With prior CAD systems from other software vendors, they were used to regular failure under increased load. After moving to Zuercher Suite, the agency discovered that extra calls did not have to equate to system problems.

"With many of our prior call management software systems, we had learned to prepare for it to fail under increased load. However, with Zuercher Suite and the reliability we have seen in the system over the past two years, we never even considered that it wouldn't do everything we expected it to do," Tilson said.

Peak System Demands

With Hurricane Irma headed Oconee County's way, the agency knew their call volume would increase. However, they still experienced more of a sustained load on both equipment and personnel than they anticipated or had experienced before. Over the 36 hours they were in the path of the storm, they had 2668 calls—three times their typical traffic. The communications center operated with triple staffing for more than 12 hours.



SUMMARY

AGENCY

Oconee County Sheriff's Office, SC

AREA SERVED

674 square miles

POPULATION

75,000

EMPLOYEES

200 Sworn Officers

PRODUCTS

Zuercher CAD, as part of Zuercher Suite system

“We never experienced a slow call entry, a slow response from the database, or any interruption in a dispatcher’s workflow,” said Tilson. “The CAD infrastructure did what it was supposed to do, disappear into the background and let us work.”

Configuration Improving Processes

In fact, Oconee County uses the highly configurable features of Zuercher CAD to set up standard “storm templates” that came in very handy during the hurricane event. Normally, Oconee dispatchers have screens that show calls that are pending dispatch and units available. During storms, the agency goes into a special view that allows dispatchers to separate the calls in their queue into normal emergency calls and storm-related calls.

“Our team was able to reconfigure their CAD screens in mere seconds in order to easily split storm management responsibilities away from routine calls for service. Thanks to the ease of configuration across Zuercher suite, we were prepared,” he said.

Tilson said the agency also built special recurring custom reports from the integrated Zuercher Reporting module that they use during weather emergencies that automatically pull information from their system about road closures and publish to a website every 15 minutes. Pulling statistics for storm follow-up and debriefing took only minutes.

“We’ve been able to build our own in-house tools and reports, thanks to Zuercher Suite’s configurability, instead of waiting for a CAD vendor to build us a special report,” Tilson said.

Rationale

Natural disasters don’t have to result in a disaster in the communications center. Oconee County E911 has put Zuercher CAD to the test. Zuercher CAD software did what the agency needed it to do, giving them the tools they needed to get help to their citizens during a hurricane.

“We have confidence that the Zuercher software, servers, and support team are laced with the capabilities to handle any sustained emergency operating conditions we may encounter in the future,” Tilson said.