

CASE STUDY: The Wal-Mart Tornado



WEATHERBLAST GIVES WAL-MART ADVANCE WARNING OF TORNADO

On February 17, 2008, an F-3 tornado struck the Wal-Mart store in Prattville, Alabama. The store suffered significant damage. However, no lives were lost, thanks to the advance warning the store received from Send Word Now's WeatherBlast, allowing safety protocols to be carried out in time.

Upgrading Warning Procedures

In 2006, Wal-Mart Director of Emergency Management Jason Jackson was looking for a way to enhance the safety of customers and associates in the event of tornadoes, microbursts and other severe weather events.

Having participated in the management of Wal-Mart's business continuity operations during and after Hurricane Katrina, Jackson recognized the importance of giving stores advance warning

of severe weather – especially weather phenomena that can appear suddenly. His objective was to protect lives, property and inventory, and to minimize Wal-Mart's liabilities.

At the time, alerting stores was done the old-fashioned way – by phone call from a Wal-Mart emergency manager to the store manager's office. Each individual store that might be

affected by the severe weather required its own call. And if the store manager wasn't sitting at his desk – a frequent occurrence in the busy retail environment – the message would be left with the operator, who would have to track down the manager and deliver it.

A Best-in-Class Weather Alerting Solution

Searching for a better solution, Jackson realized he had some unusual requirements. First, the data had

to be very narrowly targeted, since phenomena such as tornadoes occur in a very small geographic area. Second, the information had to be delivered to all manner of communications devices in real time. The service would have to be able to provide the alerts to multiple endpoints including cellphones, pagers and PDA's.

In the end, Jackson chose Send Word Now's WeatherBlast, powered by WeatherBug.

"We realized that when you have a major event, like dozens of tornadoes at once, it's impossible for our emergency team to manage that manually," said Jackson. "With WeatherBlast, we've got a product that automatically pushes that information out to our facilities, so they get timely notification."

WeatherBlast in Action

Jackson's foresight paid off huge dividends in February of 2008, when tornadoes ravaged the southeastern United States. The National Weather Service counted 138 tornadoes that month, breaking the previous record of 83 from 1971.

When a tornado bore down on the Wal-Mart in Prattville, Alabama, Send Word Now's WeatherBlast had already given the store ample warning to initiate safety procedures.

"There is no doubt that this system possibly saved lives this day."

-Jason Jackson

"There is no doubt that this system possibly saved lives this day," says Jackson. "I am thrilled to report that no one was injured or killed on our property. We suffered what I would term 'extreme' damage at the facility from a merchandise, asset, and structure standpoint, but lost no lives. This is why I call the Send Word Now weather notification system a success."