South Carolina county alerts residents moments before dangerous tornado strikes with help from CodeRED

When a tornado threatens, there is little time to prepare; find out how one county rapidly reaches residents to save lives and property.

CUSTOMER PROFILE:
Situated in Upstate South Carolina, Spartanburg County sits at the crossroads of Interstates 85 and 26.

PROBLEM:
Subject to tornadoes and other weather interruptions, officials in Spartanburg wanted a way to deliver information quickly to keep residents safe.

SOLUTION:
Using CodeRED, officials can now reach county residents with automated weather alerts as well as with customized messages whenever needed.

BENEFIT:
Residents appreciate knowing that when the next tornado strikes, the county emergency services team is at the ready with life-saving alerts and other information.

Tornadoes loom in South Carolina
Situated in Upstate South Carolina, Spartanburg County has around 300,000 people and sits at the crossroads of Interstates 85 and 26. Despite its peaceful appearance, the state of South Carolina has been subjected to an average of 26 tornadoes per year since 1990. 2017 was no exception, with October storms damaging buildings, flipping tractor-trailers, downing trees and wrecking homes in the Spartanburg area. The county had reports of at least 20 accidents along with malfunctioning traffic lights and trees blocking roadways.

Emergency notification saves lives
In 2017, while one tornado, rated EF-2, ripped apart large buildings on Business 85 at New Cut Road near Spartanburg Community College, another one, rated EF-1, wrought havoc through one of the most heavily populated residential and business areas in the county. According to Spartanburg County Emergency Management Director Doug Bryson, no one was injured or killed from the storm, in part because of the alert sent out to cell phones with the CodeRED Weather Warning application. Many people were alerted minutes before the twister touched down via cell phone and were able to seek shelter from the howling winds and flying debris.

The Solution: CodeRED.
Even a month after the tornados hit, Bryson said county residents were expressing their thanks for the CodeRED system. He further explained how it works, saying, “CodeRED is a phone-based notification system that residents opt into. As soon as the weather service issues a warning, CodeRED sends the alert to those who've signed up and are located within the area of danger.” Bryson notes that the system also sends out alerts for winter storm and flash flood warnings, and the county uses the system to send timely information to those in the system, like when an evacuation is ordered and people need to find shelter.

How emergency managers and others use CodeRED:
• Issue automated emergency alerts to apprise residents of water or power status after systems are interrupted
• Activate evacuation plans and guide residents to safety in the case of hurricane or other disaster
• Provide timely local information from a trusted source to reassure and inform anxious residents

The end result
According to Bryson, several thousand people are registered with CodeRED in Spartanburg County and more are likely to sign up now that they’ve seen it in action. “We’ll continue to maintain and offer this service,” Bryson said. “We have no intention of stopping it as we feel it definitely saves lives.” Spartanburg County residents can register for CodeRED through a link on the county’s emergency management website at www.scoem.org.