The Wal–Mart Tornado

On February 17, 2008, an F-3 tornado struck the Wal-Mart store in Prattville, Alabama. The store suffered significant damage. But no lives were lost. Here's the story of what happened… and what, fortunately, did not.

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 with little or no advance warning. His objective was to protect lives, property and inventory and minimize Wal-Mart's liabilities.

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.

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-of-Breed Real-Time Weather Alert Solution

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

First off, the data had to be very narrowly targeted; 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 was ready.

> "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."

Send Word Now WeatherBlast Activity

11:27AM
Severe Thunderstorm Warning automatically issued by Send Word Now's WeatherBlast via phone and email to store management

12:34PM
Tornado Watch issued by WeatherBlast via phone and email to store management

1:31PM
Tornado Warning issued by WeatherBlast via phone and email to store management – emergency procedures enacted at store level

2:34PM
Tornado Warning Update issued by WeatherBlast via phone and email to store management – emergency actions continued (shelter in place)

3:06PM
Tornado hits the store

send word now

For more information or to request a demonstration, please call Send Word Now at (800) 388-4796 or e-mail us at: weatherblast@sendwordnow.com