

[by Colin Garrison for Juvaré.com]

## **Case Study: In Oklahoma, WebEOC 9 Helps 300 Local Emergency Managers Work as One Team**

The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security is responsible for coordinating the efforts of over 300 local emergency managers. It relies on Juvaré's WebEOC 9 emergency management platform to weave those managers into one team to protect the four million residents of the disaster-prone Sooner State.

### **A Beautiful But Disaster-Prone State**

Oklahoma, in the South Central region of the United States, is a beautiful state with large oil and gas reserves, a colorful pioneer history, a rich Native American heritage, and a passion for college football. It is also one of the most disaster-prone states in the U.S., ranking third in a recent MoneyWise website analysis of which states are most likely to be hit by natural disasters.

The state is frequently struck by calamities of all kinds. It lies in the heart of Tornado Alley and is often ravaged by twisters. It is also prone to flooding, wildfires, severe thunderstorms, and hailstorms.

The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (ODEMHS) is tasked with helping the state's residents and businesses prepare for and recover from these events. The department operates the State Emergency Operations Center, located in the capital, Oklahoma City, to oversee the governmental response to disasters and emergencies. ODEMHS also works with a network of some 300 local emergency managers in identifying threats, maintaining situational awareness, and mobilizing resources for response and recovery statewide.

Several aspects of the situation in Oklahoma make the work of ODEMHS uniquely challenging. The high frequency and severity of disasters in the state has already been noted. Tornadoes—a form of disaster to which the state is especially prone—strike with little warning and travel unpredictable routes. And the jurisdictions that make up the network vary from well-resourced cities to vast tribal or rural areas where the emergency management office consists of one person working out of a pickup truck; this can allow gaps in disaster awareness and response.

### **Finding a Partner in Juvaré WebEOC**

Fortunately, ODEMHS has found a reliable, capable partner to help it in handling its unusually daunting slate of responsibilities: Juvare WebEOC 9.

“WebEOC 9 has been a great tool for us,” says Zakary Legarda, a Situational Awareness Analyst and WebEOC administrator with the department.

The state uses WebEOC 9 to achieve situational awareness during disasters, coordinate the distribution of resources from fire trucks to cooling centers, access statistics on impacted communities, integrate the efforts of nonprofit organizations, document actions, and more.

By setting up local emergency managers with WebEOC accounts and introducing them to the mobile version of the platform, ODEMHS has turned its sprawling network of EM professionals into a connected team that works together to protect the people and assets of Oklahoma.

“The approach we have has been working great for us,” says Legarda. “We process requests and situational awareness through WebEOC. And we rely on our partners to share information when we have complex incidents.”

ODEMHS has been using WebEOC for several years, but Legarda says the platform has achieved a major leap in capability and acceptance with the latest version, WebEOC 9.

“The new version is visually appealing and more intuitive,” says Legarda. “It feels easy to use. It really enhances that end-user experience.”

The state’s success with WebEOC 9 has come down to a few key factors, according to Legarda. These include the recent modernization of the platform’s display boards, the state’s use of premium boards, the department’s ongoing training and outreach effort, and their ability to “Oklahomify” the platform, customizing it to meet their needs.

### **Improving Situational Awareness**

First and foremost among the benefits ODEMHS derives from WebEOC 9 is enhanced situational awareness.

“We use EOC to create a common operating picture,” says Legarda. “That was our biggest goal.”

By vacuuming up data from many sources, such as the National Weather Service, a satellite service, and the state’s network of local emergency managers, Web EOC 9 makes a broad, real-time picture of threats, impacts, and response activity all across Oklahoma available to all users. The data is displayed on easy-to-read maps and dashboards.

“We’re able to get a broad overview and also get into the nitty-gritty,” says Legarda. “We are able to capture all levels of our stakeholders in WebEOC.”

The platform allows local agencies to see when their neighbors are likely to need their help. It can also help ODEMHS recognize when a situation is exceeding the capacity of a local emergency manager and mobilize assistance.

### **Boosting Resource Management Capability**

WebEOC 9 also provides ODEMHS a powerful resource management capability.

Local jurisdictions load their deployable inventory into the platform—everything from fire task forces to chainsaw crews to swift-water rescue teams. This enables managers all over the state to know what resources are available and where.

The platform also allows managers in impacted areas make and track requests for the resources they need to prepare, respond, and recover.

To maximize its resource management capacity, ODEMHS uses a premium WebEOC 9 board they call the Request Inventory Deployment (RID) board.

“That board has been game-changing for us,” says Legarda. “Being able to put multiple layers on the map and do real-time analysis of the data. That has given the best awareness.”

### **Other Ways Oklahomans Benefit from WebEOC**

Improved situational awareness and resource management are just two of the benefits WebEOC 9 has provided ODEMHS. Others include:

- Providing emergency managers fingertip access to critical background information on impacted areas, such as census data, the number of homes and businesses, and where the community falls on the social vulnerability index.
- Serving as a central repository of emergency response data. “WebEOC is our system of record when it comes to preparedness and response,” says Legarda. “If it’s not in EOC, it didn’t happen.”
- Supporting office and field use of the platform through multiple versions (desktop, tablet, phone).
- Allowing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to see where their help is needed. (Volunteer groups are given the same access to the state’s WebEOC 9 dashboards as emergency managers.)
- Facilitating post-incident review. “WebEOC helps us successfully work through incidents and go back and reflect on them,” says Legarda.

- Facilitating requests for reimbursement from agencies such as FEMA, including tracking equipment and personnel costs and preparing reports.

## **A Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

As a seasoned organization, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security knows that excelling at disaster response requires a commitment to continuous improvement.

In moving forward in its use of Juvare WebEOC, the department anticipates increasing its use of the platform in the preparedness and recovery phases and continuing its ongoing education and outreach effort with the local emergency managers, to deepen the already broad acceptance of WebEOC among that critical group. It also hopes to leverage the platform to improve self-sufficiency among the different regions of the state.

However, the department has already enjoyed great success in using WebEOC to weave the state's 300 local emergency managers into one team to protect the people of Oklahoma.

"We're heading in a great path with WebEOC," says Legarda. "We look forward to using it in the future and seeing where it's going next year."