

Lincoln Keeps Residents Safe and Informed during Flooding Hazard

When unseasonably heavy rains resulted in town-wide flooding, the Lincoln Police Department leveraged the Blackboard Connect platform to keep the community informed of both road closures and the availability of public safety resources. According to Kevin Mooney, Lincoln's chief of police, "During past storms, people would call up saying they were stuck in traffic. This time everyone knew better and went a different way. It saved people hours of frustration and meant we didn't have to send officers out to deal with traffic situations."

CHALLENGE: Keep Community Safe and Informed During Severe Flooding

Located twelve miles from Boston, Massachusetts, the Town of Lincoln has a population of 8,500; approximately 2,000 residents are associated with nearby Hanscom Air Force Base. The town encompasses 14.2 square miles and is primarily suburban in nature.

In early April 2010, unseasonably heavy rains hit Lincoln and the surrounding areas. The sheer volume of water caused severe flooding. The National Guard was called in to assist with sandbagging, and more than 100 homes received water removal assistance from the fire department. Overall, \$600,000 worth of damage was done to homes and property. According to Kevin Mooney, the town's chief of police, "I've never witnessed such a large shutdown to and from Lincoln. One of the main access roads to the regional high school was closed. Bus routes had to be changed and long detours for commuters were put in place because the whole area was flooded."

SOLUTION: The Blackboard Connect Service

In 2007, the town had implemented the Blackboard Connect service to facilitate timely communication with residents during weather events. "The department had discussed implementing a way to keep people informed during storms," said Mooney. "A neighboring town was also using Blackboard Connect, and they were very complimentary about the service. We looked into the service, and we were able to sell its usefulness to the town."

Quick Facts

-) Located 12 miles from Boston
-) Population: 8,500
-) Used the Blackboard Connect service to keep residents informed and aware of road closures during heavy rains and flooding



When the April forecast called for unseasonably heavy rains, the police department turned to the Blackboard Connect service to keep residents apprised of potential road closures and public safety hazards. “We wanted residents to realize that there were potential issues coming, especially with road closures. In years past, we’ve had snow storms that would detour traffic and we’d have horror shows with people getting stuck in traffic jams, trying to find alternate routes.”

RESULT: Lincoln Residents were Aware of Latest Flood and Traffic Information

The town used the Blackboard Connect platform to send out more than half a dozen messages over the course of five days. Residents received information about road closures—and subsequent re-openings as the floodwaters receded—in advance of morning commutes. Drivers were then able to reroute their trips, which resulted in fewer traffic jams—and less frustration. “During past storms, people would call up saying they were stuck in traffic. This time everyone knew and went a different way,” said Mooney. Feedback from residents has been positive. “I run into people, and they compliment the department and say how great it was getting the messages. I had a lady drop off a note the other day to thank us for the phone calls she received during the storm. She said she’d never experienced such thoughtfulness from a town.”

Using the service to keep residents apprised of road closures and public safety measures lessened the burden on both dispatchers and police officers and allowed for a more efficient use of existing resources. “My dispatchers were still getting calls with questions, but nothing like we’ve had in the past with detours for an accident. The volume of calls was certainly reduced, and we didn’t have to send officers out to direct traffic,” said Mooney. “Normally, when we have an event this big, we’ll keep someone from a shift or bring people over early. During this storm, we didn’t have to do that every day because we weren’t having the same difficulties.”

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Police Chief
Lincoln, Massachusetts

While the town has used the Blackboard Connect service for almost three years, the recent storm was instrumental in demonstrating the service’s continued usefulness. “We’re up for our contract soon, and I know I’m not going to have any problem getting that contract renewed,” said Mooney. “Six months ago we might have had people questioning the service’s relevance. Our use of it during the storm demonstrated the benefit of having the system in place. It also made me realize I probably haven’t been using the system enough.”

Mooney continues to recommend the Blackboard Connect service to other cities that need a way to keep residents informed in a timely, efficient manner. “I don’t want to bash the competition, but I just have not heard anything negative about Blackboard Connect. When it comes to something new, everybody fears what it will cost, how many upgrades will be required, or the availability of places to store equipment. With Blackboard Connect, this isn’t a problem. I recommend it highly.”