



Maine Funds Library of Geospatial Information State of Maine

Summary: *Last year, the people of Maine and their political representatives all voted “yes” to create and fund an initiative designed to provide geospatial information and tools that can be used for a wide range of preparedness applications for emergency planners and first responders throughout the state. Through an outreach and public education effort, project developers were able to overcome legislative and funding challenges.*

One of the most important libraries in Maine contains no books. An electronic compendium of geospatial information, the Maine GeoLibrary is designed to support disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery throughout the state by making precision geographic information available to emergency responders and the general public. The library has numerous applications for emergency preparedness, including, for example:

- Providing detailed information on terrain elevation, roadways and watercourses to assist emergency responders during a flood disaster;
- Geo-coding outbreaks of a bio-event such as anthrax on a map, allowing public health officials to monitor disease trends, facilitate containment and possibly pinpoint the disease origin; and
- Providing precise geographic information about a chemical spill to facilitate the lock-down of perimeters and establishment of evacuation routes.

The Maine GeoLibrary project was approved and funded partly because of the effort project managers put into explaining the need for such a complex and technical initiative to members of the public and their state representatives. By focusing on key legislative committees, project promoters were able to advance a project that would contribute substantially to emergency preparedness in the state. The project team was able to demonstrate that the GeoLibrary was not just a technological tool for experts but also useful to the public at large. In 2002, the team’s efforts paid off. The legislature passed the bill creating the library and an oversight board. After that, residents voted overwhelming for the project in a state bond referendum in November.

Building upon the GeoLibrary foundation, the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are involved in an effort to build a Regional Incident Management System that will allow emergency officials to track and manage disasters and bioterrorism attacks on a region-wide level. Authorized individuals would be able to enter data in a secure online form to allow a real-time, interactive perspective on the threat.

“This initiative will bring all levels into view in one EOC,” said Dan Walters of the Maine Chief Information Officer’s office. “There will be one geographic view to allow officials to visually understand what is going on. That’s critical for preparedness.”

To submit a ‘Smart Practice’ for consideration or subscribe to Smart Practices Spotlight send an e-mail to SmartPractices@fema.gov

Smart Practices Spotlight highlights practices and ideas that members of the emergency management and responder community have found useful and effective; they are not necessarily advocated or endorsed by FEMA. For more information about the Maine GeoLibrary initiative, contact Dan Walters at (207) 624-9435 or dan.walters@maine.gov.