

CHAMBERS COUNTY

THE CHALLENGE

Ryan Holzaepfel, emergency management coordinator for Chambers County, had a problem, and it wasn't a feisty alligator. Emergency services staff working in this bucolic, coastal region were encountering areas of low paging reception that were interfering with vital emergency communications. Holzaepfel knew that a technology upgrade had to happen soon to fix the problem. Many people counted on the system: four emergency medical service (EMS) teams, 10 volunteer fire departments, and other vital county divisions such as the sheriff's office, the arson team, and animal control.

Along with the need for more reliable coverage was increasing demand for a system that would work with cell phones, allowing staff to communicate via text messaging and email if needed. The goal was a more flexible solution that would work with different devices and fit the diverse needs of multiple departments.



THE SOLUTION

"I researched and researched to find a solution we could have control over and manage in-house," says Holzaepfel.

Spok® Messenger was the answer. The solution provided comprehensive coverage and enabled Emergency Services to initiate a single message and have it delivered to a pre-determined group. Recipients could use pagers, cell phones and smartphones, or email to receive communications.



OVERVIEW

Chambers County Emergency Management, located in Anahuac, Texas, serves the 36,000 residents of Chambers County, just southeast of Houston. The department works to meet the varied needs of this rural area known for its beautiful coastline, saltwater wetlands, and the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.

INDUSTRY

Government and Public Safety

BUSINESS DRIVERS

- Continue to provide fast, effective community response with smoother communications
- Attain better service in low-reception areas
- Support messaging to multiple device types
- Replace aging technology
- Send alert details to both individuals and groups
- Desire to use cell phones and texts for messaging

SOLUTION

Spok® Messenger (critical alerting)

RESULTS

- Improved safety and response times for the community
- Increased notification flexibility – individual/group messages and support for multiple recipient devices
- Improved coverage for communications

➤ “We were able to use the Spok solution to incorporate text messages, and everyone loves that. The dispatcher doesn’t have to make a decision between sending a text or alphanumeric page because either works. We can also use email and send a single notification to many people all at once.”

Ryan Holzaepfel
Emergency Management Coordinator

THE RESULTS

The upgrade produced immediate results. “The product allowed us to identify areas that had poor reception, and take care of outlying areas,” Holzaepfel said. An added benefit is that radio traffic has been reduced because users can now refer back to numbers on their pagers rather than call in to get that information.

The system also has the desired flexibility: “We were able to use the Spok solution to incorporate text messages, and everyone loves that. The dispatcher doesn’t have to make a decision between sending a text or alphanumeric page because either works. We can also use email and send a single communication to many people all at once,” said Holzaepfel.

Another benefit is efficiency. “If you have a large fire and the dispatcher knows it will take several departments to manage it, he or she can just contact many people at once. With the old system, people had to be contacted individually,” Holzaepfel added.

The technology fits their needs, whether it’s an animal control situation, a notification for county judges, or a severe weather alert that needs to reach local hospitals and schools simultaneously.

Chambers County isn’t getting rid of their pagers though. “Sometimes there are delays in the cell system. I tell the teams not to rely on cellular service for emergency dispatch. We still largely use pagers for emergencies,” noted Holzaepfel.

Big changes in performance haven’t meant a disruption for staff. “We haven’t really needed much customer support. The equipment has been very reliable,” said Holzaepfel.

The new system helped resolve a recent situation smoothly. Holzaepfel got a report about an alligator in a ditch close to a local Waffle House®. Using the upgraded system, he immediately got in touch with animal control staff, who caught it and transported it to the game warden. The alligator was then released safely back into the marsh. Holzaepfel’s timely response meant a safer environment for his citizens, the ultimate goal of his department.