# Zoom Helped Monroe County Save Lives During Hurricane Irma

Customer: Monroe County, Florida, which was heavily impacted by hurricane Irma

Challenge: Needed daily conference calls with more than 30 different government agencies/utilities/non-profit organizations located throughout the Keys and outside the County. Their Polycom solution was not an option for agencies outside our network.

Solution: Instant, user friendly, and reliable even in low-bandwidth environments, Zoom provided virtual meetings, group chat, screen sharing, and mobile support

Result: Zoom is the county's top-ranked video software, and now 100+ people host emergency management Zoom calls, both internally and externally.
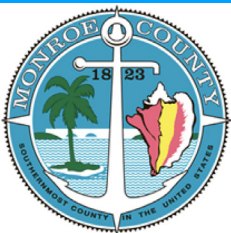
Customer

Monroe County is located in the state of Florida and consists of 21 departments. More than 99% of the Monroe County population lives in the island chain known as the Florida Keys and 54% work in the tourist industry. In 2016, tourism brought $2.7 billion to the county.

When hurricane Irma hit Florida in August 2017, Monroe County's employees had to address this emergency, making sure to fill all unmet needs in coordination with the public utilities, transportation outlets, law enforcement, school district, constitutional offices, fire rescue, social services, volunteer groups, the county's five municipalities, and state and federal emergency agencies. Preparing their response to this and future hurricanes became Monroe County's primary concern.

Challenge

Polycom was the main solution used among Monroe County's team for routine operations, with the ability to use that at various locations throughout the Keys. But in extreme emergencies, such as hurricanes, this was not adequate because agencies outside the county could not use it at their locations. Thus, Monroe County's leadership was looking for a fully online cloud communications platform that was usable for all agencies wherever they were located and stayed reliable in low-bandwidth environments. They were looking for software that was user friendly, instant, and provided group chat, screen sharing, and both video and audio meetings.

In addition to the inconvenience of driving to join onsite meetings, many of Monroe County's employees couldn't troubleshoot the Polycom hardware if something went wrong. Often times, it took at least ten minutes to simply figure out how to start a meeting. Time is of the essence when it comes to emergencies, so Polycom wasn't an efficient solution.

Solution

In the summer of 2017, Monroe County's Emergency Management Director introduced Zoom to the organization as a reliable communications tool during storms and hurricanes. Initially, it was used for Special Magistrate code compliance hearings, in which the judge is located in Tallahassee and the rest of the proceedings are conducted in Marathon. It worked so well - and was cost effective, that the county decided to use Zoom for emergency management communications. Zoom was utilized by anyone involved in emergency response, such as all municipalities, utility companies, Florida Department of Health, and the U.S. Coast Guard to communicate during emergencies. However, right after employees were set up with Zoom accounts to start testing it, Hurricane Irma hit Florida.

Therefore, Monroe County's management team ended up using Zoom to the fullest extent and with limited prior training as their communications savior during hurricane Irma. Zoom's highly intuitive interface made it easy to start and join meetings, which was essential in dealing with emergencies.

"Monroe County procured a satellite internet connection the week before Irma. It was a portable dish, which provided a 4MB down / 1MB up connection – not a lot of bandwidth to support 100+ people in the Emergency Operations Center. We had always appreciated Zoom's capabilities under broadband network connectivity, but its performance on a very small satellite connection was exceptional and it was a true testament to the work Zoom has done, optimizing video transmission across any connection … Zoom was a lifeline for that period of time," said Alan MacEachern, Director of Information Technology for Monroe County.

Cammy Clark, public information officer for Monroe County, said, "The best part of Zoom was an ability to join a video conference call on the phone, whether one works from home, is in the car driving, or shopping in a grocery store. On the day after the storm, I was on a Zoom call when my laptop's battery died, and there was no electricity to charge it. Thankfully, I was able to rejoin the meeting from my phone."

Result

The county IT Director created a chart, where he listed which communications software performed either poor or excellent during the storm emergency. Most of them were marked as "poor," yet Zoom was the leading solution, designated as the most easy and reliable communications tool during Hurricane Irma.

Currently, Zoom is a number one platform used by Monroe County's teams both internally and externally. Various County department directors use Zoom for their meetings. More than 100 people from about 25 plus agencies join Zoom for emergency management calls. The program sustainability director is using Zoom to meet with contractors and people that are working on canal restoration projects.

Additionally, Monroe County covers a 120-mile long island chain, and because of such a widely spread geography, it has three courthouses, two detention centers, and many other public facilities. Therefore, employees often have to drive long distances. Zoom's laptop and mobile support significantly cuts down on employee travel, even between emergencies.