

Software aids in area emergencies

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Local law enforcement agencies, first responders and Neighborhood Watch groups are now able to work together using commercial grade software that allows them to view aerial photography of Phelps County to assist in emergencies.



The software was made available in March at the request of the Phelps County Disaster Committee (PCDC) from the Global Mapper company. Global Mapper donated a copy of the software to the Rolla Police Department (RPD) and the Phelps County Sheriff's Department (PCSD). PCDC has been using the software to create Neighborhood Watch databases for several months and now law enforcement agents will be able to use the program in conjunction with Neighborhood Watch groups and in law enforcement activities.

Neighborhood Watch captains can collect data from residents in their watch programs that can be stored in files in the software. Residents of a neighborhood can become part of the database at their own request. They can supply as much personal information as they want to their Neighborhood Watch captain to be put in the program. Knowing information about residents may help assist in an emergency. For example, an elderly resident with diabetes may choose to register this information with watch captains, making them aware that he or she may need special care in an emergency. Locations of burglaries and break-ins can be documented, as well as serial numbers of stolen merchandise. Knowing who lives where in a neighborhood may also help watch captains develop evacuation plans.

"It helps people become more aware of their neighborhood," said Chuck Pederson, USGS geographic information systems specialist and PCDC volunteer and USGS liaison. "The police department and sheriff's department can create new files as they become necessary."

Pederson has been creating Neighborhood Watch databases for several months, and along with other USGS volunteers, has trained watch captains and emergency responders on how to use the software.

"We've trained several Neighborhood Watch groups," he said. "We do two-hour workshops and their ready to go."

With donation of the software to the RPD and the PCDC law enforcement officials will now take over creation of the databases. Law enforcement agents will give the files back to watch captains, who can only view information about residence in their Neighborhood Watch programs so that personal information is kept confidential. PCDC hopes that with the help of a grant 25 more commercial grade copies of the software will soon be available so that watch captains can create and maintain their own databases.

For now, PCDC detective Carmelo Crivello is the Neighborhood Watch liaison for the sheriff's department and detective Andy Davis creates the Global Mapper databases. RPD officer Jason Finch is the Neighborhood Watch liaison and detective Jason Smith is trained to use the Global Mapper software.

"These are really nice folks," said Pederson of the law enforcement officials involved in the program. "They enjoy dealing with the public and Neighborhood Watch groups."

However, the software can be used for a variety of law enforcement activities in addition to the help it provides Neighborhood Watch.

"The software that's been donated goes well beyond Neighborhood Watch capabilities," Pederson said.

The software can be used by law enforcement to survey an area and develop a plan before entering into a potentially dangerous situation. This could be helpful for both search and rescue and in an instance such as a meth lab bust. The software allows users to draw perimeters around an area, create a search grid, use a global positioning system (GPS) with the software, and measure distance and acreage.

"In addition to just looking at the data, it has some tools within it," Pederson said.

The software not only shows aerial photography of streets and structures, but can be used to view topographical information as well. The visual information



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used in the program was made available from Phelps County Assessor Kevin Rasmussen, who released the most recent photography taken by the county for use in the program. Pederson took the information provided by Rasmussen and used USGS resources to organize over 300 pieces of photography into one image that could be used with the software program. The images can be continually updated to add new structures or developments.

"We have a acquired more recent photography than anything available on the web," Pederson said. "We really thank Kevin Rasmussen for making that available to us. It's an ongoing cooperation between the Phelps County Disaster Committee, law enforcement and the assessor's office."

Pederson also added how thankful PCDC is to Global Mapper for making the cooperation possible through use of the software.

"On behalf of the Phelps County Disaster Committee we would like to thank the Global Mapper Company for making a donation to the Phelps County Sheriff's Department, the Rolla Police Department and PCDC," he said.

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