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Plangraphics Aids New York City in Wake of World Trade Center Attack

Frankfort, KY – PlanGraphics, Inc., a GIS consulting firm already under contract with New York City’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM), suddenly shifted its mission to aid OEM in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center. Just last month, PlanGraphics, in partnership with Environmental Science Research Institute (ESRI), helped the emergency office bring on line a web-based GIS application that directs New Yorkers to emergency heating and cooling shelters. In addition, the site provides information on evacuation routes in the event of a major hurricane. Residents can type in their home address on the web site and be directed to the nearest heating or cooling shelters or evacuation routes.

All that dramatically changed on September 11. The Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management was located in the #7 World Trade Center Building. Fortunately everyone was evacuated before #7 WTC itself became a casualty of the attack. OEM scrambled to find nearby space and set up an emergency headquarters on a midtown Hudson River pier. They immediately set out to restore the web site and add new applications that would aid the rescue and recovery effort.

PlanGraphics New York Project Manager, Jim Hall, and Analyst, Doug Williamson, immediately went to the temporary OEM offices to help City officials who requested suggestions on how to apply GIS to the disaster. After consulting with PlanGraphic’s Silver Spring office, headed by Eastern Region Vice President, Rich Goodden, the staff set out to develop new applications to New York’s Emergency Management Online Locator System, know as EMOLS. They developed an extension to EMOLS called the Interactive Map for Emergency Information (IMEI). Also at PlanGraphics’ suggestion, the City obtained helicopter and aerial photography of “ground zero” to use in coordinating ground personnel.

PlanGraphics continues to maintain and enhance the OEM web site which contains maps of the current status of “ground zero.” Those include pedestrian and vehicular access, subway service, water and utility outages, and other transportation information. OEM receives map information from the Emergency Mapping and Data Center (EMDC) located in the City’s Emergency Operations center. The IMEI web-site is updated daily by PlanGraphics staff and can be viewed at www.nyc.gov/html/em/home.html.

Background

PlanGraphics, Inc., is a national and international systems integration, design, and implementation company that provides a broad range of services in spatial information technology. Those services include geographic information systems (GIS), automated mapping/facilities management (AM/FM) systems, land information systems (LIS), and related information technology (IT) applications. PlanGraphics' headquarters are located in Frankfort, KY, with regional offices in California, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island. Our Web site is www.plangraphics.com.

PlanGraphics has played a key role in designing and implementing an enterprise GIS in New York City since 1994. Vice President Rich Goodden took a lead role in the technical design for the base map that is now known as "NYCMAP." Working with Al Leidner, New York's Citywide GIS Coordinator, Rich provided guidance on the many complex technical issues that had to be addressed in order to build a consensus among the many City agencies. PlanGraphics also worked with other contractors and conducted a citywide GIS needs assessment that gathered information from over 20 departments and divisions. Another example is the assistance provided to CUNY-Hunter College in its Quality Assurance program and in developing training designed specifically to support the review of mapping products.

The objective of all this activity was to create a central repository of commonly used GIS data and make it available to all City departments. Thus was born the concept of a GIS "data warehouse" or what the City refers to as a Central GIS Utility. When completed, this Utility will contain layers of data including digital orthophotos, planimetric mapping, the water and sewer system, and street centerline and property data. City employees can access the data through their own intranet application, called CityNet, and Internet applications developed for the Office of Emergency Management are now accessible to the general public. The events of September 11, 2001, have cast a whole new light on GIS and its importance in planning for disasters such as occurred in New York City.

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