



Never Repeat History

With the Emergency Towing Plan in place, Walker County, Texas is prepared for the worst



C:LOGIC

The Situation:

Weather-Related Emergency Towing

During September 2005, millions of Houston-Galveston area residents evacuated in hundreds of thousands of vehicles in what became known as the largest mass evacuation from any major metropolitan area in the history of the United States. The threat: Category 5 Hurricane Rita.

Public safety and law enforcement agencies, elected officials, and evacuees proved unprepared for the magnitude of the challenges of such a mass exodus from such a heavily populated area. Seven to nine hour treks over routes that would typically take about an hour resulted in countless vehicles overheating, experiencing mechanical failure or the biggest problem, running out of fuel. Desperate to flee the Category 5 storm, thousands of drivers had no choice but to abandon their vehicles, pile into other vehicles and continue moving inland.

“We, along with state and local authorities, spent countless weeks trying to connect abandoned vehicles with their rightful owners after Hurricane Rita,” said Sheriff McRae. “We see this important initiative as pivotal in assuring that the nightmare of that experience is never repeated.”

**Clint R. McRae, Sheriff
Walker County, TX**

The Challenge:

Vehicle Tracking & Recovery

Abandoned and disabled vehicles littered the shoulders of major freeways and parking lots throughout Texas – and Walker County, north of Houston, was just one of many municipal law enforcement agencies that was left to deal with the frustration of towing, storing and reuniting abandoned vehicles with owners who couldn’t remember where they left them.

Led by Sheriff Clint McRae, the Walker County Sheriff’s Department assumed major responsibility for identifying and locating the owners of approximately 300 missing or abandoned vehicles towed in the days after Hurricane Rita. In contrast, the Walker County Sheriff’s Department typically tows and stores 300 vehicle tows over an entire year.

Sheriff McRae’s team ordered the removal of abandoned vehicles off the freeway shoulders and private property and assigned two full-time Walker County Sheriff’s Department officers to process the towed vehicles in the department’s possession. These officers undertook the daunting task of manually cataloging vehicle identification numbers, license plate numbers, makes, models and other data in paper-based log books and began the search for the vehicle owners. Seven months after the initial evacuation call, the last vehicle was returned to the vehicle owner.

*For people in emergency or crisis situations,
accessible and accurate information is essential*



Walker County Hurricane Emergency Towing Plan

Offsite, Multi-Jurisdictional Towing Management

The Solution:

C:LOGIC Hurricane Emergency Towing Kit

In July of 2007, C:LOGIC met with Walker County Sheriff's Department to explain how the Hurricane Emergency Towing Kit could ensure that the next time a major weather event happens (and on the Texas Gulf Coast, it is not a matter of "if", but "when"), his team would have the necessary infrastructure in place to handle the collateral impact. The Walker County Sheriff's Department personnel learned firsthand the importance of being equipped with an easy and effective solution when another serious public safety crisis situation of the magnitude of the Hurricane Rita occurs. Vowing never to repeat such a situation, Sheriff McRae agreed.

"We, along with state and local authorities, spent countless weeks trying to connect abandoned vehicles with their rightful owners after Hurricane Rita," said Sheriff Clint R. McRae. "We see this important initiative as pivotal in assuring that the nightmare of that experience is never repeated."

C:LOGIC's Emergency Towing Kit went operational for Walker County in August 2007 as part of the Southeast Texas Towing Initiative. The Southeast Texas Towing Initiative enables law enforcement agencies in different jurisdictions to share data about towed and stored vehicles through a single, authoritative repository developed, maintained and hosted in a secure, highly available, offsite data center.

Vehicle Information-sharing and Notification Service (VINS), the underlying technology for the kit, allows offsite electronic reporting and tracking of emergency towed vehicles and features a searchable Web Site that allows citizens, insurance companies and other affected agencies the ability to locate missing vehicles without the need for law enforcement and city involvement.

The Result:

Prepared for the Worse

According to Sheriff McRae, the Walker County Sheriff's Department has found that the C:LOGIC service has increased efficiency and effectiveness of towing management. He singles out the user friendliness of the VINS as the key to its quick adoption and ongoing use for towing operations within the county.

"Any agency that does not currently utilize a towing management service like VINS would be wise to try this one," commented Sheriff McRae.

With regard to additional planning for any future hurricane evacuation scenarios or other emergencies that could threaten public safety, the Walker County Sheriff's Department also has established agreements with local towing companies to report all vehicles that have been towed or stored to enable the faster and more efficient recovery of abandoned or missing vehicles.



C:LOGIC