

CASE STUDY

Keeping a Football Town Running, No Matter the Weather

From football Saturdays to tourism and major community events, weather intelligence helps Lincoln-Lancaster County prepare for changing conditions.

ABOUT LANCASTER COUNTY

On a fall Saturday in Lincoln, Nebraska, roughly 90,000 people fill Memorial Stadium for Husker football. Add outdoor concert venues, a city marathon, and one of the largest junior rodeo events in the country, and you have a community where weather is part of planning for nearly every major outdoor event.

Jim Davidsaver, Director of Emergency Management for Lincoln and Lancaster County, is the “eye in the sky.” He monitors and addresses severe weather threats, and staffs and activates the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), where subject matter experts convene alongside traditional first responders when the community is in harm’s way.

When Davidsaver took over the role 12 years ago, DTN was already in place. He reviewed other weather providers, weighed his options, and ultimately stayed with DTN.

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WEATHER REQUIRES CONSTANT SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Multiple weather sources help Lincoln-Lancaster County understand what comes next

Unpredictable weather makes situational awareness the core of Davidsaver's job, and he builds it in layers.

"If we're going to have a bad day, it's more than likely weather-related," he said.

His team uses National Weather Service (NWS) alerts like the members-only Slack channel, where he can reach the meteorologists on duty. DTN WeatherSentry works alongside NWS alerts as part of the County's broader weather intelligence toolkit.

"If and when our EOC is activated, it is one of the primary feeds that we follow," Davidsaver said.

With a warning in effect, Davidsaver and his team use the warning polygon to understand which parts of the County may be affected and compare that information with reports from volunteers and community liaisons in the field.

"I also literally have eyes and ears in the field to confirm," he said.

The pace is real. The EOC has been activated 19 times this year to monitor severe weather threats, including two tornado warnings that led to activation of the County's outdoor warning siren network.

INFORMATION FOR THE PEOPLE MAKING THE CALLS

Weather intelligence helps event organizers and venue operators make informed decisions.

Davidsaver's job is to make sure event organizers and venue operators have the information they need when it's time to make the call.

"I don't tell the operators and organizers what to do," he explained. "Hopefully, I give them the good information that allows them to make a good decision."

That approach continued as the rodeo rolled into town. In July, the National High School Finals Rodeo brought tens of thousands of people and animals to Lincoln in the heat. Davidsaver pays close attention to Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT), a heat metric commonly used to help event organizers understand potential heat impacts.

"I want to make sure that the decision-makers have all those variables available to them to make an informed decision if they're going to postpone an event, cancel an event, reschedule things."

WBGT is available in the DTN forecast feed, one of the weather factors his team monitors when evaluating heat-related conditions.

INFORMATION PEOPLE CAN ACT ON

Weather information only creates value when it reaches the people who need to act on it. For Lincoln-Lancaster County, that starts with the EOC. In the field, volunteers and community liaisons carry emergency management radios, allowing weather conditions to be verified by people on the ground.

That coordination extends to extreme heat. The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department has extreme temperature plans tied to heat advisories, watches, and warnings, and it leads public messaging efforts. Davidsaver works closely with the department to ensure a second layer of communication reaches the "inner circle."

"We want to make sure that our first responders — from police, fire, emergency, and medical to anyone from social services — are aware of the extreme temperatures, so they can take added measures to make sure their staff is adequately outfitted and protected from the heat," he said.

That group also keeps vulnerable populations in mind, including "the very young, the very old, and those individuals who are unhoused if their options for shelter are limited."

Jim is realistic about what his office can and cannot control.

"I can't stop the rain from falling; I can't stop the wind from blowing. But if I can notify those who need to know these things promptly, that helps communities prepare, respond, and stay safe," Davidsaver said.

After 12 years in the role, Davidsaver continues to rely on DTN as part of the County's weather intelligence toolkit. While he can't control the weather, he can help ensure the people responsible for responding to it have the information they need to act.

