

Hurricane Survivors Turned to Technology in Florida and Texas continued



Tim Grollimund looks at the projected path of Hurricane Irma on his phone while staying in a shelter in Miami after evacuating his home in Key Largo along the Florida Keys, Saturday, Sept. 9, 2017. (AP Photo/David Goldman)



[David Jannetty](#)

APM-EMH Program / Co-Director, Undergrad Public Service Programs
John P. Burke School of Public Service and Education

Hurricane Survivors Turned to Technology in Florida and Texas

The recent hurricanes that passed through Texas and then Florida provided a stark reminder of how much we rely on technology and the many ways it can be leveraged to help us lead better lives, including keeping us safe when Mother Nature strikes. With Hurricanes Harvey and Irma providing a one-two punch in these States, many people relied on social media and smartphone apps to either report they were safe or seek emergency information and assistance. High winds from these major hurricanes and the storm surges that resulted in widespread flooding created survival situations for thousands of people in both States. Many survivors turned to a familiar friend, technology, to help them through these life-threatening situations. Here is some of the technology used by disaster survivors.

Facebook. Social media giant [Facebook provides a feature called Safety Check](#). It allows users in disaster zones to declare themselves safe for the benefit of family members and friends. Additionally, if a user has not reported that they are safe, Safety

Check allows family and friends to request their status. Facebook makes Safety Check easy to locate and simple to use. Ease of use is of particular importance for people who may be without power and using devices with limited battery capacity. Facebook knows you are in a disaster zone by determining your location through user-provided information, using the GPS feature on your device, or identifying the location from which you have accessed the Internet. Users will see the Safety Check option appear on their account when they first access it after an event has occurred in their area.

Twitter. During the hurricanes, Twitter users were able to use the [Red Cross Twitter page](#) to obtain information on disaster aid and assistance. The Red Cross used the page to continually push out information to survivors advising them of evacuation shelter locations and other disaster-related resources. The page provided a link to the [Red Cross Safe and Well page](#), where people were able to register themselves as safe and well. Family and friends were also able to access the page and search the database.

FEMA app. [The Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) has an app](#) that makes it easy for people living in disaster zones to provide basic damage assessments, including the ability to upload photos so that emergency personnel can make informed decisions about emergency response operations and disaster recovery strategies in that area. Additionally, app users can seek information about personal preparedness and disaster survival tips. Further, survivors can get the latest weather alerts and information about emergency shelters open in their areas. The app is designed to empower users by providing them with useful information so they can help themselves. This becomes critical in the minutes and hours after a disaster when first responders are often overwhelmed and unable to assist those in need.

With technology seemingly always at our fingertips, it is easy to understand why people are anxious to leverage it in new ways. It only makes sense to use technology in furtherance of our most primal motivators, the need to be safe and to survive no matter what Mother Nature has in store for us.

David Jannetty is the Program Chair for the Emergency Management and Homeland Security program at Post University and is Co-director for Undergraduate Public Service Programs in the John P. Burke School of Public Service and Education. David is a retired assistant deputy police chief with the Waterbury, CT Police Department. He has over 25 years of experience in emergency management, law enforcement, and school and workplace safety.