

SDSC Helps Red Cross Reconnect Families after Kansas Tornadoes

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Warren Froelich

More than 13,300 friends and family of those devastated by giant tornadoes last Friday evening in southwestern Kansas checked the "Safe and Well" website, a collaboration between the American Red Cross and the San Diego Supercomputer Center. The free and secure website, hosted at SDSC in the Center's state-of-the-art machine room, lets residents impacted by the tornadoes easily report their status as "safe and well," allowing loved ones to quickly search the list for news.

At least a dozen were killed and 60 injured by the wave of tornadoes, including 10 in the community of Greensburg, a small prairie town of 1,800 residents. Authorities said the twisters destroyed at least 90 percent of the commercial and residential buildings in the town, located about 120 miles west of Wichita.

According to the latest figures from the Safe and Well website, a total of 338 residents from the community registered on the site, with about 13,300 friends and family querying the site for information.

"This sharp spike in responses to the Safe and Well site is something we haven't seen before" said Chaitan Baru, a recognized expert in data technologies and SDSC Distinguished Scientist. "I'm gratified to see that this technology, developed for scientific research, is helping to aid the Red Cross in emergencies such as the one that struck Kansas this weekend."

To post news to the site, simply log on to www.redcross.org, and click on the Safe and Well section. Select "List Myself as Safe and Well" and follow the instructions. To check on the well-being of a loved one, go to Safe and Well and click "Search."

The SDSC collaboration with the Red Cross began while Hurricane Katrina was still raging, when staff at the Center quickly began working with the Red Cross, Microsoft, and others to develop a "missing and found" superlist of those displaced by the hurricane, processing more than 250,000 names from multiple sources for public website dissemination during the emergency.

Based on the experience, the Red Cross developed the "Safe and Well" website with help from Microsoft and other partners, launching it last July for the 2006 hurricane season, which fortunately was relatively quiet. As with any other Red Cross service, Safe and Well safeguards the privacy of disaster victims according to privacy law standards.

Media Contact: Warren Froelich, 858-822-3622