

SAIPAN STRONG: THE ROLE OF MAPS IN DISASTER RECOVERY

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On August 2nd, 2015, Typhoon Soudelor enveloped the entire island of Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) as it cut its destructive path through the western Pacific. The devastation it caused was worse than anything in recent memory. As islanders began to recover and rebuild, the need for accurate, accessible, and up to date information was critical. Whether it was the locations of shelters, which gas stations had fuel available or just where to find electrical power and a Wi-Fi signal, GIS and online maps demonstrated the powerful role they can play in communicating recovery information to the public as well as providing a medium to share stories and strengthen community bonds.

This session will provide an overview of how staff from the CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality (BECQ) collaborated with the Disaster Response team from Esri (a leading GIS software and consulting company) to create an online repository of maps and applications relevant to the recovery effort. This ArcGIS Online organization was used to publish and host applications as diverse as crowdsourcing maps where local residents could share their concerns and advice through social media feeds, and maps with accurate information on where to find clean drinking water. It was also used to produce story maps to graphically illustrate the typhoon's devastating effects and the resiliency of the island residents.

The session will focus on examples of the online applications but will also cover challenges in implementation, the relative success of some applications over others and the role that Esri played in the process.