If a funnel cloud has a silver lining, it might take the shape of a SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard. The whims of Tennessee weather brought a mixed blessing to the Montgomery County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) in 1999 when a tornado whirled through the city of Clarksville, tearing up building after building. The EMA center, home to deputy director Jerry Buchanan and his group of storm-trackers, was one of the victims. Finding itself in need of a new home and new equipment, the EMA obtained an All Hazards Planning Grant from TEMA/FEMA and went in search of the best technology available for emergency mitigation.

Once a SMART Board interactive whiteboard was suggested as a means of coordinating agency members during county disasters, its suitability for the job became obvious. The SMART Board interactive whiteboard has expedited responses to countless emergencies in Montgomery County, from severe storms and hazardous materials spills to 911 calls and evacuations. In conjunction with software such as DTN MxVision Weather Sentry and a geographic information system (GIS), the SMART Board interactive whiteboard conveys information in a highly visible manner and acts as a common frame of reference for the team. “I guess we fell in love with it,” says Buchanan. “Everybody in the emergency operations center can see the track of the storm as damage reports come in. You can pull up the damage report location with GIS, zoom in and circle the spot with your pen. The touch-screen makes it quick and easy.”

Because emergency responses often involve staff from disparate agencies, from firefighters to Red Cross workers, the ability to gather, inform and direct an EMA team expeditiously is crucial to effective mitigation. In order to convey information about a disaster to a large assembly of team members, the leader requires presentation tools that are responsive, intuitive and easy to see. Rather than attempting to coordinate a response strategy through verbal explanations or the use of individual computers, Buchanan is able to address his group as a team from the moment red flags are raised. According to Buchanan, “When you can actually see where the situation has occurred, it gets us all on the same page right away and keeps us there. It’s better than someone just getting up and saying, ‘Well, we’ve got damage here and there.’”
Montgomery County
Emergency Management Agency
Case Study, Clarksville, Tennessee, USA

As damage reports come in, staff can easily track the damage with a simple touch or stroke of a pen, giving the team a clear understanding of the disaster and the measures needed to deal with it. “You don’t waste time running back to your computer and moving your mouse around,” Buchanan explains. Briefing sessions wrap up quickly and responses occur with the speed required to prevent injury, save lives and avert disaster.

Being able to see a crisis on a large screen facilitates the EMA’s reaction to a wide variety of situations. The EMA team uses its SMART Board interactive whiteboard to monitor and display 911 calls by accessing the e-911 call log. With their GIS, the team can zoom in on the exact location of the call and quickly analyze the situation, noting any physical aspects of the caller’s location that might impact the emergency. “People call in and say, ‘I have a tree across the road,’ or ‘An electric line is down,’ and I can see the information as the 911 dispatchers enter it into the call log, and respond to it – without 911 having to call and tell us.”

During the calm between emergencies, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard does not fade to black. It is a vital part of training sessions for groups of volunteers, firefighters and other emergency staff. Leaders find that the ability to mark and highlight presentations makes them more engaging and effective. At the end of a session, the leader’s notes can be saved for the next session, eliminating hours of preparation time. With its volunteers and staff properly trained, the EMA is ready to face the next emergency, from fire to flood.

Whether the skies above Montgomery County are murky or clear, the EMA’s response system functions more efficiently and effectively with the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Because of its intuitive, user-friendly nature, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard has become the silver lining in many a Tennessee cloud. It is the hub of the emergency operations center, and is constantly surrounded by those who train to mitigate disaster, or by those who work best under the pressure of a thunderhead.

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About SMART
SMART Technologies Inc. is both the industry pioneer and a global market leader in user-friendly interactive whiteboards and other group collaboration tools. SMART products include the award-winning line of SMART Board® interactive whiteboards, interactive pen displays, interactive digital signage, conferencing applications and software.

SMART products are designed to meet the requirements of today’s corporate environment. With SMART’s versatile products, users are able to effectively display media-rich information, host and participate in audio and video conferencing, share desktops remotely, collaborate, share data and efficiently train personnel. SMART products are used in more than 100 countries around the world, and customers include BMW, Disney Engineering and Toyota Motors.