

Laserfiche ECM Blogs

High Water No Threat to this School's Records

Written by Laserfiche Staff

If El Niño delivers on its promise of storms, floods, and other meteorological unpleasantness in the Southwest this year, one school district that won't be too concerned about protecting precious records is the Liberty School District, facing the Trinity River in southeast Texas.

After surviving two punishing floods and a near-miss by a tornado in four years, the district converted its record system from paper to weather-proof Laserfiche Document Imaging software. Since 1987, Laserfiche, a division of Compulink Management Center, Inc., has been developing document imaging systems to help organizations find files faster. Now, instead of 16 four-drawer file cabinets stuffed to bursting with aging paper and 5-by-7-inch index cards, fewer than 10 pocket-sized CD disks contain academic records going back to the 1920's, with every recorded grade of every student available for instant call-up by a few key-taps.

School counselor Roberta Thornton says it was the floods of 1990 and 1994 that convinced the school board it was time to investigate the potential benefits of the paperless office. "The 1990 flood wasn't so bad," she said, "Only a few neighborhoods were affected, and a few houses under water. After it was over, everybody said 'Well, that'll never happen again.' "

But it did, in October 1994, and it was far worse. The Baptist Hospital (now Liberty-Dayton Hospital) across the river from the school, was inundated, and its nursing home had to be evacuated. And Mrs. Thornton received a pre-dawn telephone call.

"It was four or five in the morning," she said recently, "They told me that the levee had broken and we had to get right up there to save the records. Well, when I arrived, the water was rising but it wasn't up to the school yet. We went inside, the principal, Don Lorenz; the superintendent, Dr. Joseph Crane; and I. We went into the records office, where the big four-drawer file cabinets are. We took out all the bottom drawers of all those cabinets, and put them on top to give us a foot or so of leeway, in case the water came up that high. I want to tell you, a standard file cabinet drawer filled with paper is no light little thing. It's HEAVY!

"And those files were dry. Can you imagine what the job would have been like if the water had risen higher and we'd had to pull them out soaking wet?"

It was still dark, but the river had reached the two-story building's porch when Mrs. Thornton went home. The school auditorium and part of the gym, below ground level, were flooded, but she was able to reach her car without getting her feet wet. Principal Lorenz wasn't so lucky: he stayed longer, lifting a second tier of file drawers atop the cabinets, and by the time he left, he had to wade across the parking lot.

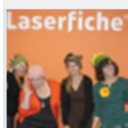
The water never entered that part of the building above ground level. The records remain dry to this day. But school was closed for a week because of high water throughout the town.

So Liberty High survived the 1994 flood. But, as if these humans needed any more convincing about the powers of Mother Nature, a tornado grazed the school just a few months later, lashing the tennis court. That was enough for Mr. Lorenz and the school board. They decided that the next natural challenge might not be survived quite as well. They consulted Charles Beard, President of DynaSource LLC, of nearby Beaumont, who since 1975 has made a specialty of counseling independent school districts on computer and archiving problems. He set up a small, self-contained Laserfiche Document Imaging system for the school, at a cost of less than \$10,000 for the software plus the labor of converting nearly 80 years of paper records to storage on virtually-indestructible plastic disks.

This meant replacing 16 large file cabinets with a package small enough to fit on a desktop. To find any student's record, all a clerk needs to do now is slip a five-inch disk into a PC disk drive, and type a few letters and numbers: the required data leaps to the computer's monitor screen.

The next time the Trinity River acts up, one person can carry the Liberty High School student records to safety with one hand. And if that person oversleeps, or doesn't hear the telephone, there'll be a backup set of disks higher and dryer in the school district's main administration building, a few miles away. And Mrs. Thornton has reclaimed valuable office space, which the looming file cabinets had taken away from her.

The new system also gives Principal Lorenz a new feeling of security. "We feel we will now be in compliance with guidelines and will be protected against future calamities," he said.



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