

FireKing Customer Story – Hurricane Katrina

Pass Christian School District, Pass Christian, Mississippi

Written by FireKing

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When a disaster occurs, protection of vital records should be a main priority (after the protection of human life of course) due to the fact that if a vital record is rendered unavailable, i.e. damaged, lost or destroyed, then after the dust clears, so to speak, the subsequent recovery efforts will be seriously compromised, if not totally hobbled.

Vital school records consist of both organizational records that contain data that deals with the operations of the school district as well as very sensitive, personal student information; and there is no shortage of laws and policies that govern the handling, management and protection of such information, whether it is stored as hard copies, microfilm and/or digital versions.

Vital school records that are categorized as vital may include critical data relating to budgets, student records, written curriculums, achievement test scores and a host of other official papers and essential information, and it is the underlying responsibility of the individual school district to be accountable for the safety and security of these records, and the real test as to whether a district has properly prepared comes when a major disaster occurs, such as the devastating floods experienced in the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The experiences of the Pass Christian School District in Pass Christian, Mississippi last fall in the wake of Hurricane Katrina are perfect testimony to this fact. Pass Christian is located in Harrison County, Mississippi, and the area was hit hard with a 30 foot storm surge that swamped the entire region - as far as 15 miles inland in some places. Pass Christian high school was submerged under 18 feet of water, with the district's the middle school and one of its elementary schools completely destroyed. The school district re-opened almost two full months after the storm on October 17, 2005.

In such dire circumstances, as one can imagine, once the recovery process began, there was a great deal of concern among the staff regarding the payroll. Schools need teachers, maintenance staff, administrators, nurses, and other workers to function, and in many cases, their own housing, health, and financial situations were anything but certain after the disaster.

Patty Myriek, a specialist in the district's HR department, recalled that "the district central office was at one point under 30 feet of water; and when I returned to Pass Christian immediately after Hurricane Katrina, *the only thing still standing inside* was the district's FireKing file cabinets." Myriek continued: "All the schools' payroll records were kept safely inside the specially designed UL-rated FireKing file cabinets, so we were able to get our payroll system back online right away and get our people paid, as you can imagine getting

funds to our employees - who were in many cases drastically affected by the flood - was a very important factor in the overall recovery process.”

“After seeing how the FireKing product performed, we made the decision that once we fully rebuild, all school records will be stored in fireproof FireKing cabinets.”

Although the national news media has since moved on to cover other stories, the reality is that the Pass Christian School District still needs assistance. Currently, all of the students in the district attend class at one elementary school where FEMA has set up 45 trailer classrooms. Three fourths of the students and staff are still displaced; staying living in trailers, tents or with other friends and family in the area. In an effort to assist in the Pass Christian School District’s recovery, FireKing Security Group made a donation of five fireproof, water-resistant filing cabinets, and the company encourages other companies and individuals to continue to do whatever way they can to help Pass Christian and other Mississippi school districts recover from Hurricane Katrina’s devastation.

To learn where your help is most needed, contact Melinda Williams, Coordinator of Donation Efforts with the Mississippi Department of Education at 228.222.0171

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