



MICHELMOND/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

everyone leaving for the storm? If not, it was explained to these citizens that there may come a time help was needed and emergency services would not be able to get to them.

The general public is not always aware that in certain conditions, first responders are stopped by the weather much like any other person. Those that chose to ride out the storm were told to call with their location if things got too bad. To put it bluntly, they were told to call with their location if they thought it was possible they were not going to survive the storm. Sadly, too many of these calls were made during the hurricane. Callers told dispatchers their names and their addresses.

What about those houses that were lifted off the foundation and physically moved? It was necessary to get as much information as possible from these callers. Where did the house originally start? From there, officers would know where to look. Help was not available during the storm itself. Officers would be dispatched to these locations as soon as the storm ended. Not all landmarks were gone. Callers and call takers alike relied heavily on those that were still secure. Citizens would give their location based off where it was originally or a landmark that had not moved. Officers on the street had to be able to visualize their location based on their own personal knowledge or a map book within their unit.

Technology has changed greatly since 2005. Location accuracy tools such as latitude and longitude coordinates can give a more reliable location than a scared and confused caller. That caller normally has very little idea

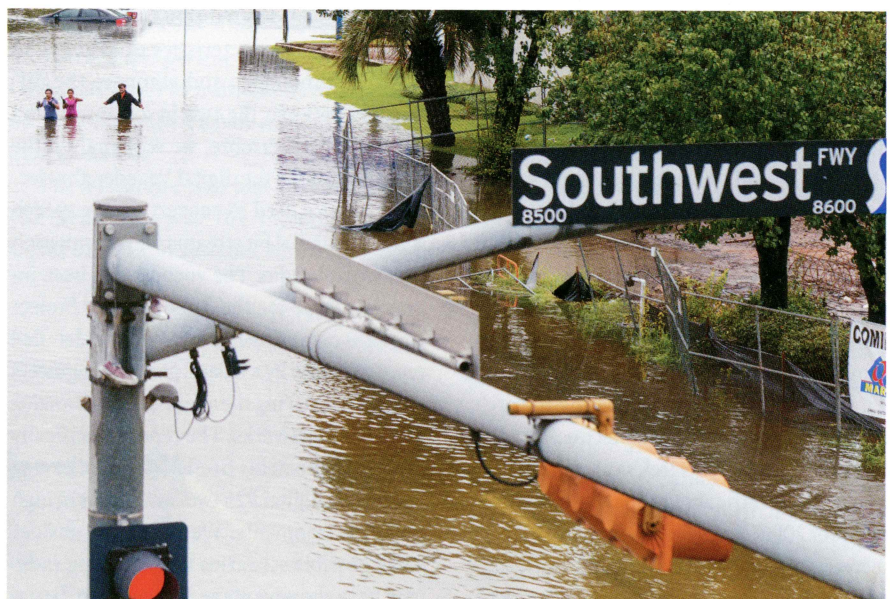
of which way a building may have moved or how far it moved from its original location if they are even aware that it has moved. People lose their orientation even if they are outside looking at landmarks and street signs. Just as their buildings have moved, other buildings within a disaster zone may have too. There have been many problems in the past that some centers may deal with now and will continue to do so in the future.

### THE FUTURE

Some of the changes in 9-1-1 have made location accuracy much more reliable. Phase II gives coordinates that are helpful and were not available previously. Latitude and longitude are available to us now with capabilities

such as altitude on the way. Video stream from callers will help if dispatchers can get a sense of where a caller is located based on the background that is seen. To aid dispatchers in knowing the location of their officers, GPS tracking systems have become the norm for many agencies. Automatic vehicle locators attached to units are a reliable source. Body-worn devices are used to track officer locations as well as cameras for their use. All of these GPS tracking systems make it easier to find units in the field. These may be units that are having a difficult time knowing their location during an event or immediately following an event. Much like a stressed caller, officers may feel overwhelmed in the face of a disaster. Being able to verify locations with callers based on what is seen on a screen can have a calming effect on a situation and bring aid more quickly. Location accuracy has come a long way and is evolving as technology does the same. Our first question will always be, “9-1-1, where is your emergency?” ●

*Alex Snyder is a Communications Floor Supervisor with Biloxi Police Department. She began her career in dispatching with the thought that it was a temporary job. Her 12-year anniversary was Dec. 28. She has lived in Biloxi all of her life. She was one of the citizens who questioned where she would find herself at the end of Hurricane Katrina. She’s grateful that life led her to a career in telecommunications. She’s married with one daughter.*



MICHELMOND/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM