

This applicaton is for:	J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award
Project Title	2025 Hurricane Preparedness Campaign
County or Counties	Dorchester County
Application Contact	Mario Formisano
Application Email Address	MFormisano@dorchestercountysc.gov
Presenter(s) Name and Title	Jason Ward, County Administrator; Tom McNeal, Director of Emergency Management
Main Presenter's Email Address	tmcneal@dorchestercountysc.gov

Project Written Submission

Project Summary

Dorchester County has significant risk to inland flooding from tropical storm and hurricane storm surge. More than 80,000 residents live in one of three hurricane evacuation zones; many of whom moved to the area from places where tropical cyclones are not a threat. The Dorchester County Emergency Management Department (EMD) is responsible for preparing their local governments, citizens, and businesses for natural and man-made disasters. Each year, EMD enhances its creative initiatives to educate the public about their risk and vulnerability to disasters, with emphasis on tropical storms and hurricanes. Last year, after a successful, nationally recognized partnership with Tradesman's Brewing to launch a special beer can with a QR code to the state's hurricane awareness webpage in 2023, EMD engaged a local coffee shop to launch a special coffee and bag which includes the same QR code – as a new way of spreading the word of hurricane preparedness. This year, 2025, the coffee, Storm Surge, was re-released; a partnership with a local Summerville coffee shop, along with several other innovative strategies to broaden the public's access to preparedness information, from a livestream prep talk while running the Cooper River Bridge Run to a hurricane awareness-themed parody of The Temptations song, My Girl, to the largest local hurricane expo in the tri-county area.

Project Effort/Difficulty

Led by the Emergency Management Department, the annual hurricane preparedness campaign requires cooperation with county, municipal, and private/nonprofit organizations. Communication, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration are the pillars of an effective emergency management program. Most of a program's success is built on strong working relationships and trust. Dorchester County values these relationships to prepare, respond, and recover from crisis, with life safety as the top priority. The most significant challenge involved synchronizing schedules to carefully plan the engagement activities and determining the appropriate time to schedule events to maximize outreach. The Public Information Office coordinated media to increase opportunities for on-air interviews, event promotion and coverage, and general information sharing to broaden campaign reach. Staff collected hours of video to prepare social media and the Storm Surge music video, which included choreography and editing. Most of the costs associated with the campaign were related to staff hours and equipment usage. The lone hard costs were used to purchase the special edition Storm Surge coffee bags, used by Coastal Coffee Roasters. For the fourth consecutive year, the Hurricane Expo was held at the County's Ashley River Park. The park requires a \$2 per person admission fee, which has never been a deterrent to the expo-goers as the event has continued to grow in attendance each year. Primary costs involved in hosting the expo were primarily

related to staff hours from participating in County departments. The remaining goals will also involve reaching more people throughout the community – increasing our engagement on social media, being more visible in television and radio, and larger attendance at public events. To make these improvements is to carefully plan a communications strategy each year so content and delivery do not become stale.

Benefit/Importance of Project

Tropical storms and hurricanes are one of the greatest natural hazard threats to Dorchester County. More than 30% of the county is at risk for storm surge and even more areas are susceptible to inland freshwater flooding, which is responsible for most storm-related deaths nationwide. Dorchester County has a responsibility for its residents, businesses, and visitors to prepare for emergencies and disasters, beginning with public education and outreach. We realize that many individuals receive information through different mediums. In order to maximize its reach, hurricane awareness campaigns must be carefully and strategically planned. Since 2015, Dorchester County has experienced more than 8 major flood-related emergencies, primarily as a result of tropical weather. These events have resulted in dozens of homes and businesses sustaining major damage or being destroyed, and hundreds of roadway segments impassible or damaged, requiring significant restoration work. Comparatively, the county's impact from flood events far outweighs the impacts from other events including wind events and winter weather. As of July 1, 2024, Dorchester County's estimated population is 174,663, making it one of the fastest growing counties in the state, and most of the growth took place in the eastern half of the County – roughly 2/3 of the eastern half is in a hurricane evacuation zone. Through the County Government and Emergency Management Department social media pages, tropical storm and hurricane education and outreach extends the length of the county from communities in the far west near Orangeburg County to the far east near Charleston County.

While the County has implemented innovative ways to engage the public in hurricane preparedness for many years, the 2025 campaign utilized more engagement tools than ever, combining social media, television, print, a billboard, and public meetings. The hurricane expo event, Hurricane Expo and Family Fun Day, was widely attended with approximately 600 individuals coming through the venue during the event with the opportunity to learn and hear from hurricane preparedness experts, such as National Weather Service, South Carolina Emergency Management, and more, in a relaxed environment; this was the County's largest attended hurricane expo yet. The hurricane expo was sponsored, for the first time, by WCSC Live 5 News, with multiple news video features prior to the event, including one with Chief Meteorologist Bill Walsh; the expo was also advertised on social media and a billboard near the venue, which received approximately 46,200 weekly views, targeting a heavy local traffic area. The special hurricane preparedness music video received more than 11,000 views on social media; this was an engaging, memorable, and unique way to attract the attention of residents.

In addition to these promotions, as a part of this hurricane preparedness campaign, at the start of hurricane season, the County's Emergency Management Specialist was featured in a hurricane segment on Palmetto Life, the #1 lifestyle show in the Lowcountry with an average viewership of 9,200 live broadcast viewers; and the County's Director of Emergency Management was featured in a morning segment of WCIV ABC News 4 discussing vital hurricane information. In April, during the Cooper River Bridge Run, the County's Emergency Management Specialist provided hurricane preparedness information in a Facebook livestream while running the race and wore a special hurricane shirt with a QR code to the state's hurricane preparedness webpage; the Facebook livestream video received 22,542 views with engagement from viewers throughout the video. As a follow-up piece to the bridge run, WCIV ABC News 4 covered the Facebook livestream as a way to "creatively promote hurricane preparedness".

The high turnout of the hurricane expo and views and engagement on the large variety of mediums showcases the success of this campaign, which continues to grow each year. For many of the County's newer residents, there may be a learning curve understanding the impact of tropical weather for areas away from the immediate coast. These outreach efforts target both the new residents and residents who benefit from reminders to stay vigilant and weather aware, especially during hurricane season.

Project Originality/Innovation

All of South Carolina's coastal counties have adopted the Know Your Zone program, which was developed in coordination with the South Carolina Emergency Management Division. County emergency management departments are responsible for amplifying the statewide campaign by developing and

implementing local awareness programs based on their tropical weather risk. Dorchester County's program is unique for several reasons, beginning with the partnership with Coastal Coffee Roasters to brand a seasonal coffee, Storm Surge, which includes a QR code to hurricane.sc for hurricane evacuation zones and other preparedness information. In the first year of the "Storm Surge" coffee, a short video was shared on social media, including a County Councilmember, the County Administrator, and Emergency Management Director – the video also promoted the county's annual hurricane expo. This year, the County produced a music video, a parody of The Temptations, My Girl, titled Storm Surge – just over 60 years since the original hit was released in December 1964. Written and sung by the County Administrator, Jason Ward, the lyrics to Storm Surge emphasize the importance of preparing for hurricanes, including the need for an emergency supply kit. The video was filmed at Coastal Coffee Roasters, with the coffee shop staff, a County Councilmember, Administrator's Office staff, and the Emergency Management Department. Another innovative strategy this year, as part of the Know Your Zone campaign, included a livestream by the County's Emergency Management Specialist, one of the department's two meteorologists; in the video, he ran the Cooper River Bridge Run while simultaneously streaming on Facebook to provide hurricane preparedness information and engaging with user questions – from the starting line to finishing line. Finally, the County has become host to one of the largest—if not the largest—hurricane preparedness expos in the state. From the inaugural event at Lowe's Home Improvement Store in 2012, this event has evolved in recent years with more exhibitors than ever before and more attractions for audiences of all ages at the County's flagship park on the Ashley River. In addition to the coffee, livestream education race, and expo, emergency management staff made several public appearances, presenting at a County Council meeting and giving television interviews, including an appearance on WCSC's Palmetto Life program.

Concluding Remarks

Dorchester County's 2025 hurricane preparedness campaign demonstrates that public safety education can be both effective and engaging when rooted in creativity, community partnerships, and cross-platform outreach. Recognizing that over 80,000 residents live in hurricane evacuation zones—many unfamiliar with coastal storm risks—the County's Emergency Management Department crafted a localized campaign using culturally relevant tools: branded coffee, engaging social media content, a music video parody, and interactive events such as a livestreamed awareness run and a large-scale hurricane expo.

This effort exemplifies innovation in emergency management by merging traditional outreach with fresh, accessible methods that meet residents where they are—on their phones, in local businesses, and at community events. More than just branding, "Storm Surge," became a conduit for lifesaving information, leveraging local trust and national recognition to drive home a vital preparedness message.

Through collaboration with public information teams, media outlets, local coffee roasters, and elected officials, Dorchester County turned a potentially dry topic into a memorable and shareable community campaign. As a living, evolving initiative, this program continues to grow in visibility and effectiveness—helping build a safer, more informed public.

Dorchester County General Hurricane Preparedness Promotions

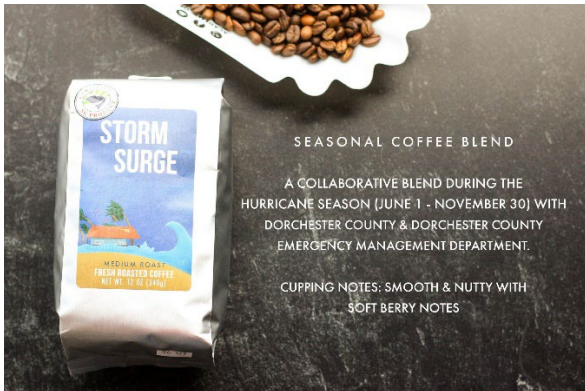


WCIV ABC 4 News Coverage: [Cooper River Bridge Run/Facebook Livestream on Hurricane Preparedness Story](#)

Storm Surge Music Video/ Facebook: [Click here](#)

Hurricane Expo Feature Video/Facebook (see below image): [Click here](#)

Storm Surge Coffee Partnership (see images below from Coastal Coffee Roasters' social media pages)



SEASONAL COFFEE BLEND

A COLLABORATIVE BLEND DURING THE HURRICANE SEASON (JUNE 1 - NOVEMBER 30) WITH DORCHESTER COUNTY & DORCHESTER COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT.

CUPPING NOTES: SMOOTH & NUTTY WITH SOFT BERRY NOTES



SCAN THE QR CODE ON THE BACK FOR MORE INFORMATION

Dorchester County Promotions for the Hurricane Expo



Live 5 Sponsorship Video with Bill Walsh/Facebook: [Click here](#)

Palmetto Life Hurricane Segment: [Click here](#)

WCIV ABC 4 News Morning Show Hurricane Segment: [Click here](#)

Live 5 News Hurricane Expo Feature: [Click here](#)

Billboard in high traffic area of the County (see below)

A billboard advertisement for the Hurricane Expo. The background is a dark, stormy sky. On the left, a white-bordered box contains the text: "Dorchester COUNTY HURRICANE PREP EXPO & FAMILY FUN DAY MAY 31, 10am- 1pm ASHLEY RIVER PARK". Below this box are logos for "103.5 WEZL" and "LIVE 5 wscw" with the text "Official Media Sponsors". To the right of the box, the text reads: "Prepare Your Home and Family for Hurricane Season BRING THE FAMILY FOR: Inflatables Train Rides Face Painting Balloon Art Food".

Dorchester COUNTY
HURRICANE PREP EXPO
& FAMILY FUN DAY
MAY 31, 10am- 1pm
ASHLEY RIVER PARK

103.5 WEZL LIVE 5 wscw Official Media Sponsors

Prepare Your Home and Family for Hurricane Season

BRING THE FAMILY FOR:
Inflatables
Train Rides
Face Painting
Balloon Art
Food

St. George (843) 563-0195
St. George Fax (843) 563-0137
Summerville (843) 832-0195
Summerville Fax (843) 832-0137



Jason L. Ward
County Administrator

**OFFICE OF THE DORCHESTER COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
201 JOHNSTON STREET
ST. GEORGE, SOUTH CAROLINA 29477**

August 7, 2025

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Competition
SC Association of Counties
Attn: Anna Berger and Competition Judges
PO BOX 8207
Columbia, SC 29202-8207

Dear Ms. Berger and Competition Judges:

Please accept this letter of support for the submission of Dorchester County's *2025 Hurricane Preparedness Campaign* for the 2025 J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Competition. More than 80,000 Dorchester County residents live in a hurricane evacuation zone and thousands more live in flood zones susceptible to freshwater flooding. Over the years, the Emergency Management Department (EMD) has developed and implemented community engagement initiatives, raising awareness to residents and businesses for the County's risk to tropical cyclones and flooding. Leveraging tools like social media, the department's outreach is greater than ever before, but EMD is always searching for new and creative ways to reach the public.

Maintaining relationships, not only with County stakeholders but with businesses and nonprofit organizations, has contributed to a better prepared community. We are thankful for the public-private partnerships that have led to opportunities for successful hurricane preparedness campaigns, and this year for the support of our own Coastal Coffee Roasters, who roasted a special blend of Storm Surge coffee. Additionally, this year's annual Hurricane Expo and Family Fun Day, hosted at the County's Ashley River Park and sponsored by WCSC Live 5 News, was the largest in the area with more than 25 exhibitors including South Carolina Emergency Management and the Charleston National Weather Service. These were just two of several innovative ways our EMD engaged the public in preparation for hurricane season, and we believe our campaign this year, with numerous methods of engagement, will be considered as the top project for the award competition.

Best regards,

Jason L. Ward, County Administrator
Dorchester County, South Carolina