

The Power of Connection During Hurricane Relief: How the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service Used Spidertracks in the Aftermath of Irma



On September 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma hit the Caribbean’s Leeward Islands with winds of up to 185 miles per hour — becoming the first Category 5 storm in recorded history to strike the region. Irma left Puerto Rico almost entirely without power; dropped 15 inches of rain on the Dominican Republic and northern Haiti; and rendered Barbuda ‘barely habitable,’ in the words of the island’s Prime Minister.

The immense storm system caused extensive and catastrophic damage estimated at over \$62 billion USD in the Atlantic zone covering (among others) Florida, Cuba, and Turks and Caicos — and for the first 36 hours after Hurricane Irma struck the latter, the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service (RCIPS) EC 135 helicopter and crew were the only available outside aid.

The RCIPS set up an air operations command at Grand Cayman and used Spidertracks’ aviation tracking capabilities to remotely monitor their Irma relief efforts, including all the transit flights and the 44 Turks and Caicos deployment flights over 600 miles away.

‘Spidertracks enables real-time monitoring of our aircraft by the unit command team and the 9-1-1 centre in areas where the helicopter may be over water or away from usable communication,’ says RCIPS Unit Executive Officer Steve Fitzgerald. ‘In our Irma relief efforts, we were in areas with absolutely no communications — and I always knew where [the crew] were.’

As is often the case with major hurricanes, it was difficult to determine where Irma would hit the hardest during the days before she made landfall. The RCIPS, who’ve been Spidertracks customers for over five years, knew they could count on the system’s reliability as they prepared to deploy to hurricane-stricken regions they were sure would have either severely decreased or zero communications capabilities.

With the knowledge that Spidertracks was keeping tabs on their location at all times, the team was able to undertake every flight with relative peace of mind.

For six days, the RCIPS did everything possible to aid the Islands, including assisting in medical emergencies and conducting assessment flights of the island airports, helping to decide whether or not they could open for use and allow additional aerial relief response.

Throughout the duration of their relief efforts, the RCIPS’s Grand Cayman command centre used Spidertracks to track the locations and actions of its aircraft and team.

Its impact, Fitzgerald says, was invaluable.

For more information, contact Todd O’Hara at todd.ohara@spidertracks.co.nz or +64211864111

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