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USNG ATLAS

Marion County Unveils their US National Grid Street Atlas for Emergency Services

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Over seven years ago Marion County's Information Technology GIS Team produced the Street Atlas for Emergency Services. This take-along-book was included in rescue vehicles long before computer displays enabled the crews to see what roads connected which allowed them to make decisions on-the-fly when they ran into obstacles. The adoption of this new standard atlas spanned across agencies including Fire Services, the Sheriff's Department and, at the time, the Emergency Medical Services Alliance (EMSA).

Monthly updates are provided to include new or modified streets as determined by the Public Safety Communications Department. Atlas owners access the updated pages, print them and replace them in their books. This atlas provides up-to-date, accurate information that far surpasses anything previously available in TIGER files or on the web and is available literally at the Emergency personnel's fingertips.

The US National Grid was developed by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) and adopted by the National Government (FGDC, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security) and the Florida Division of Emergency Management as the standard template for maps used for emergency response. The GIS Team took the initiative to research, understand and develop a comprehensive atlas that utilizes this grid system.

The USNG provides a simple to learn and understand method to accurately locate features in the US; enabling all cities, counties, states or US Government agencies to reference a location the same. This is important in emergencies where street signs and/or landmarks are missing or altered. It uses meters therefore simplifying Latitude and Longitude as well as standardizes how each entity references a location. Prior to this a county such as Marion would reference things by their local State Plane coordinate which differs from the Degrees Minutes Seconds which both differ from Decimal Degrees. In order to know what the other agency is referring to conversions have to be made. The national grid is not a coordinate system, but a reference grid. Think of it like fixed Bingo game where everyone received the same card. In this game B2 is the same location to everyone. The USNG just has way more letters and numbers.

To access the Marion County USNG Atlas, go to http://www.marioncountyfl.org/InformationSystems/IS_GIS_Maps.aspx. You will find further detail and instruction for the US National Grid in the preface. For more information regarding the United States National Grid consult the FGDC website at <http://www.fgdc.gov/usng>.