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## Emergency response grant sought for county

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Madison County is seeking to become the state's pilot site for a program that helps response teams prepare for and deal with emergencies.

The \$1 million grant that would be funneled through the state comes from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

"Madison County would be the first Mississippi county to implement the project if we get the grant," said Eddie Hanebuth of Digital Quest, a Ridgeland firm that is partnering with NVision Solutions Inc., a Gulf Coast company, to develop the computer program and training.

The pilot program centers on computer-based mapping and teaching first responders across Madison County to access the information to help cope with emergencies and plan immediate responses to their aftermaths, said Craig Harvey, executive vice president of NVision.

"If a tornado came through Madison County, it leaves a track. We can put that track into the computer. It could tell us the number of people affected, the value of property damaged, what areas are affected, how many beds available at local hospitals," Harvey said.

If the storm damaged utility pipelines, who and how they would be affected would be among other pieces of information available to emergency response teams to deal with the disaster, he said.

"This technology looks at the geography of a problem and gets you thinking of how you can use that information to your best advantage," Hanebuth said. "NVision has already tested the technology, and it's up and running (at another site)."

Digital Quest focuses on education and training, he said. "We create the materials on how to get the mapping technology into the community."

The information would not only be available to local officials, but any organization or business that would deal with the problem. William Bassett of AMR ambulance service said the system would help.

"The concept could be beneficial to private companies that contract for public service," he said. "It would benefit us. It would have data we need immediately so we would know the level of resources to commit to handle the emergency."

The grant would not require any matching funds to be put up by Madison County, and the system would be installed without any cost to the county, Harvey said.

"The benefit to the county would be \$375,000 in training," he said.

County and city emergency responders would receive training focused on the operations of the software customized for Madison County and for the municipalities by NVision, Harvey said.

The computer information would be available to every emergency management official who has a connection to the Internet, he said. "The mapping information at real time would be available at the push of a button."

"In this case, it will work within the system we have in place," Madison County District 2 Supervisor Tim Johnson said.

Luke Gordon, director of the county's emergency management office, said the new program would be an asset. "With a system like this, you can use it for chemical spills,

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floods or any kind of disaster."

Harvey said the system would work well in conjunction with Madison County's newly installed reverse 911 calling system that alerts residents within defined areas of potential problems.

The grant does not affect Homeland Defense funds that normally come to Mississippi, Harvey said.

Officials will learn in about 60-90 days whether Mississippi will get the grant for Madison County, Harvey said.

Pilot programs are competitive, Hanebuth said.

"There is no guarantee Mississippi will get the grant. It's very competitive," said Harvey.

Hanebuth said he contacted the offices of U.S. Sens. Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, and U.S. Reps. Chip Pickering and Bennie Thompson for their assistance in getting the grant for Mississippi and Madison County.

The Homeland Security grant would be a positive program to bring to Madison County, Hanebuth said. "I saw this as an opportunity to get Madison County, where I live, to be one of the leaders in the country in response technology."

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