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William S. Farrow  
256-895-1693  
william.farrow@usace.army.mil

## Center volunteer assists in Joplin recovery

HUNTSVILLE, Ala--The nearly mile-wide tornado touched down May 22 and blasted a six mile wide path through the city of Joplin, Mo.

Forty one days later, with a workload increasing, Huntsville Center's Teresa Silence, a Geographic Information System specialist joined the Joplin Recovery Field Office where she is on the GIS Cadre merging cartography, statistical analysis, and database technology to assist with virtually all aspects of recovery.

Silence is a scientist specializing in capturing, storing, manipulating, analyzing, managing and presenting all types of geographically referenced data for a variety of needs within the Corps.

After FEMA set up operations after the devastating tornado, it tasked the Corps with the removal of debris in the rights of way and properties for which Rights of Entry were obtained.

More than a month later, the original GIS team there needed replacing. That's when Silence and Nick Laskowski, a GIS specialist from Galveston district, showed up to help

The second week in July, two weeks after Silence and Laskowski arrived, Joplin declared properties with substantial debris, but no ROE, as public health nuisances and the Corps' workload increased as contractors began working on removing debris from those properties as well.

Currently the Corps is fluctuating between 1450 and 1470 ROE/PHN properties they are responsible for clearing. Silence said one of the GIS team's most important tasks is making ROE status map books for the field crews. Each night when the USACE quality assurance teams come back, they reconcile which ROEs are complete and which are not. Silence said the GIS team usually doesn't get the revised information until 7:30-8 p.m. and the field crews need the map books by 6:30 a.m. the next morning to help QA with the debris removal, which led to some late nights for the GIS teams.

"I was working late to get maps printed and books put together," but as of Monday (July 25), they changed my duty hours to 9 a.m. - 9:30 p.m. so I wouldn't be working 14 hour days.

In addition to updating the ROE status map books, the GIS staff also serves as an informal quality assurance to check for data from the different departments.

"We get data and mapping requests from the debris team, QA team, QA supervisor, real estate, critical infrastructure as well as field personnel, so we have a holistic picture of the data and will notify the departments of any discrepancies," Silence said.

For instance, she said if the status data from the debris team has a ROE that real estate has marked as cancelled, they'll let the other teams know so they can coordinate better.

Silence said they also make wall maps that depict clean up progress for meetings and presentations.

“We also update the sweep maps--the maps that help communicate progress within the RFO as well as to FEMA and the city of Joplin--to track which ROWs have been cleared,” she said.

Silence said there are other GIS personnel there helping with other team operations.

“The temporary housing team has their own GIS person, and our team provides support to the critical infrastructure team too,” she said.

The critical infrastructure team determines alternate locations and the set up of temporary fire houses, schools and related facilities.

“We create and update detailed maps that show where temporary buildings and storm shelters will be located so the critical infrastructure team can communicate with local officials. We also provide analysis and maps for identification of potential disposal sites,” she said.

As an example, Silence explained that a field was being looked at as a potential disposal site, but there was a requirement that the site had to be 200 yards from any inhabited structure, so she located the houses in the site and created 200 yard buffers on the exhibit map to show exactly where debris could be dropped.

She said the GIS teams also makes general navigation maps for the field crews—a tool vital to recovery operations since the tornado that ripped through the region was so devastating it's often difficult for workers to even navigate the area the tornado cleared because landmarks and streets signs are missing.

“Many of the field staff have taken the time to come in and thank us for the maps we make. Part way through my tour, Nick and I took our ROE status maps and navigation maps into the field and tried to navigate with them. We then understood then why the field staff is so appreciative of the maps.

We also noted some improvements that would make the maps easier to read for the field personnel,” she said. Silence's deployment to Joplin ends Aug. 1.

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**Photo Cutline: U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville employee Teresa Silence, deployed to Joplin Mo., since July 3, tracks the progress of the ongoing recovery efforts there using Geographic Information System applications at the Joplin Recovery Field Office. (U.S. Army Photo by Chris Gardner)**