

## 2017 PRSA Puget Sound Totem Awards

**Category: Public Relations Programs: Community Relations**

**Organization: Allstate Insurance, Northwest Region**

**Entry: Before the Storm Strikes: Hawaii Hurricane Preparedness Campaign**

**Entrants' names: Michelle Rico, Frank Clouser**

**Situation:** For the past two years, the Central Pacific Ocean produced more than 20 hurricanes and tropical storms, shattering records set back in 1992 and 1994 and sending Hawaii homeowners scrambling for supplies and boarding up their homes as storm after storm barreled down on the Hawaiian Islands.

And 2017 isn't going to be any better according to the [Central Pacific Hurricane Center](#). In fact, this year the Pacific Ocean is expected to spawn a higher-than-average number of hurricanes. The 2017 hurricane season also marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Iniki, which made a direct hit on O'ahu as a Category 4 hurricane, resulting in six deaths, more than 100 injuries and more than \$3 billion in damage. Another direct hit would devastate Hawaii and its 1.4 million residents; especially when 85 percent of Hawaiians are unprepared for a disaster, and 62 percent of Hawaiians don't have any emergency supplies, according to FEMA. To underscore this lack of preparedness, less than half of all Hawaiians have a household emergency plan ([FEMA 2012](#)).

Given the rise in frequency and severity of hurricanes and the lack of preparedness among Hawaiian residents, Allstate Insurance has a social responsibility to help protect Hawaiian families from any hurricane threat. Allstate is a strong advocate for home safety and disaster preparedness as a way to help protect people far beyond having a home insurance policy. Allstate became a founding supporter of [Good & Ready](#), which provided safety information and gave Allstate agents the ability to help prepare their local communities for disasters with emergency kit-building events and public education campaigns. However, in 2015, these Allstate-sponsored events ended due to lack of funding.

With the risk of major storms higher than ever, the need for preparation has never been more important for Hawaii's residents. Allstate Northwest Corporate Relations team sought to create its own hurricane kit building event, engage local communities and create a way for Allstate agents to educate residents on the need for hurricane preparedness.

**Background Research / Planning:** Following the program's end in 2015, the local team launched our own disaster preparedness event at a home builders' convention for the Honolulu public in January 2016. The campaign successfully engaged 20,000 attendees; however, it failed to garner any media coverage. Following this event, we conducted a post-mortem of our campaign, our tactics and researched future local market opportunities. Our evaluation found:

- Lack of Media Engagement: No media interest or coverage of our 2016 Honolulu disaster event.
- Limited Allstate agent engagement: Nine Allstate agents volunteered to build disaster kits.
- Inability to incorporate social media: No social media strategy or social media support for agents.
- Relevancy of event: Hawaii is susceptible to a direct hit from hurricanes, so preparedness remains crucial.

Prior to determining any future campaign, background research consisted of reviewing historical hurricane patterns and impacts hurricanes can have on Hawaii for the past four years. The team used [The National Hurricane Center](#), [Central Pacific Hurricane Center](#) and [NOAA websites](#) for hurricane frequency and impact data. The team also researched prior [hurricane media coverage](#), as well as FEMA and American Red Cross data for U.S. disaster preparedness and community response. According to the [Hawaii Emergency Management Agency](#), should Honolulu take a direct hit from a hurricane, residents should plan to stock two weeks of food that require no cooking; one gallon of water per person, per day for drinking and sanitation; and, anticipate no water, electrical or sewage service for up to 14 days (11 days above FEMA's recommendation).

With enough background information, the team researched local Hawaiian venues and uncovered Honolulu's annual Hurricane Preparedness Week (May 7-13, 2017), which would serve as our chance to prepare Hawaiian communities for a potential hurricane. With the launch of [Hurricane Preparedness Week](#), we positioned Allstate as a leader in the local communities by bringing hurricane preparedness to the forefront of the news. We rebranded our campaign; repositioning it from a generic "disaster" preparedness event to that of local Hawaiian "hurricane" preparedness kit building event – ultimately creating a media and community engagement campaign. Timing of our event one month before the start of hurricane season would also be extremely important. The team then identified key audiences, developed communication tactics to reach these stakeholders that would result in positive media coverage for Allstate, as well as educate the public about steps for hurricane preparedness. The team developed social media tactics, pitched the media for the campaign on local newsrooms' increasingly crowded radars, selected local Allstate agents as spokespeople, and developed internal communications to educate and engage the community. The campaign's goals and objectives were:

### Goals

- Accelerate Allstate's reputation through positive earned media in Hawaii.
- Educate local Hawaii residents on the importance of preparing for hurricanes.
- Position Hawaiian Allstate agents as trusted advisors with customers and Hawaii residents.

### Objectives

- Secure a minimum of 1 million positive media impressions and secure 5,000 social media impressions.
- Provide 20,000 Allstate customers and communities with hurricane preparedness messaging and resources
- Increase Allstate agent program engagement by securing 10 agents to volunteer for this event.

**Execution:** Background research was conducted January to May 2017. Internal and external communication plans were developed two months prior to the event. We partnered with the local Allstate sales leader in order to help encourage Allstate agents to volunteer one month prior to execution and began weekly outreach communications for volunteers. Fifteen agents were recruited and volunteered to turn their offices into distribution centers to help the 400 families. In the two weeks leading up to the event on May 9, media training began for our spokespersons, with complete PR support; including: talk paths, collateral, and outreach strategies to take our message to the streets. Media outreach began the Friday before the event, and print and broadcast media outlets were provided media advisories and press releases. For participating agents, Allstate's local team developed social media and website preparedness messages. The execution strategy worked – so well in fact one local broadcast station camped out at one Allstate agent's office, continuously broadcasting for five hours. A second outlet covered the single-day event for three days. We engaged the rest of our 50 Hawaii Allstate agents through our weekly eNewsletter (34 percent average open rate), and provided template safety communications to share with customers. Following the event, we saw newsletter open rates increase to 39 percent. Also, the campaign cost \$437 to execute on a \$2,500 budget; or in other words - the team came in 83 percent below budget.

**Challenges/Obstacles:** Our first challenge was convincing agents to purchase the supplies. Allstate's supplier removed our ability to purchase kits. The only way this event works is if Allstate agents purchase all the supplies for kit-building; however, the team found a solution around this and used our relationships with The Allstate Foundation to have 400 hurricane preparedness kits donated free of charge. The second challenge was Allstate's Digital Optimization Team, which controls Allstate agents' social media content. Due to limited capacity, the team would not provide social media for this event. This meant the local team had to go from agency to agency to help participating Allstate agents manually post social media (because many Allstate agents in Hawaii do not actively manage their social media). This was in addition to: setting up for the event and working with the media. The third challenge occurred when the kits were lost in transit from Chicago to Honolulu. Upon landing on the island, the campaign lead was contacted by the shipper, 48 hours before the event, and informed that the shipment of was lost. The next 24 hours were spent on the phone and at the shipping center tracking down the shipment. The kits were found with 24 hours to spare, and because of this delay, one agent volunteered their office as a drop location and pre-sort station for the kits to be repacked and delivered across the island.

**Results/Evaluation:** Northwest corporate relations surpassed every goal and objective established; including:

- **Goal 1: Accelerate Allstate's reputation through positive earned media in Hawaii.**
  - The team surpassed its objective of 1 million positive media impressions, finishing with 1,982,496 positive media impressions (98 percent above plan) from 10 media hits.
  - NW CR generated 20 social media communications, resulting in 6,474 impressions (29.5 percent above the objective of 5,000) and 412 in engagement. In addition, a Honolulu resident called out a competitor on Twitter and asked why they weren't doing a similar event for their customers.
- **Goal 2: Educate local Hawaii residents on the importance of preparing for hurricanes.**
  - In addition to the nearly 2 million media impressions that carried Allstate's preparedness message, 400 Hawaiian families received hurricane preparedness kits, and more than 34,000 Allstate customers received hurricane preparedness communications (71 percent above our goal of 20,000).
- **Goal 3: Position Hawaiian Allstate agents as trusted advisors with customers and Hawaii residents.**
  - The team increased Allstate agent engagement by recruiting 15 volunteers (50 percent above the goal of 10), and a 66 percent increase in participation over 2016.
  - Allstate used social media, traditional media and even face-to-face meetings to help local Allstate agents prepare and protect Honolulu families before the next hurricane hits.

All these tactics successfully positioned Allstate agents as advocates for hurricane preparedness and helped 400 families receive hurricane preparedness kits. Allstate's Hurricane Preparedness event had an even greater impact beyond this one-day event. Following the May 9 event, several local nonprofit organizations held similar hurricane preparedness community events – all with the same storm preparedness messaging. As the Pacific hurricane season comes to a close on Nov. 1, Allstate's Northwest Corporate Relations team is reviewing how to improve and develop a stronger event for 2018; especially when the Pacific hurricane season starts again in seven months. And if there is anything that 2017 and Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria taught U.S. residents, it's that being prepared is critical.