

THE EYE IN THE STORM

**ALEX. ISABEL. FRANCES.
CHARLEY. IVAN. WILMA.**

They all roared through the United States, pounding through buildings, streets, and neighborhoods with all of their associated hurricane fury. And the Storm Education Team was there to witness them all.

With the assistance of a Pelco Esprit camera system, they are now more prepared than ever to fulfill their goal of helping save lives through proper severe weather education and ground-truth reporting.

By Gena Pratt Johnson, Marketing Communications Writer



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THE WORK THEY DO

“Our basic message is that just because something has already happened doesn’t mean it won’t happen again tomorrow,” said John Van Pelt, Project Lead for the team. “The longer we go without a disaster, the better our chances are for another disaster and unfortunately, people become complacent and aren’t prepared when emergencies do arise.”

Van Pelt, who started the project in 1999, first saw the awesome power of dangerous weather when Hurricane David struck Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in 1979 when he anchored radio coverage during landfall and reported during the aftermath. After Hurricane Floyd took so many lives in 1999, most from vehicle-related drowning, Van Pelt began the Storm Education Team project.

The team travels from place to place during the year to teach severe weather and disaster preparedness and has recently teamed with Energizer to help families get ready, with the “Plan. Prepare. Protect.” Educational initiative.

During the Atlantic Hurricane Season, they head to predicted landfall sites, arriving before hurricanes come ashore and also cover other severe weather systems to help with reporting for the National Hurricane Center and the National Weather Service.

“It is very important that the general public has accurate information on the weather conditions in their area and how widespread the most adverse weather is so they can take appropriate action,” says Rob Macedo, Director of Operations for the VoIP Hurricane Net and ARES SKYWARN Coordinator for the National Weather Service in Taunton, Massachusetts. “If people are unaware of potentially severe weather conditions, they could be caught off guard and unprepared. Information provided by people such as the Storm Education Team give our organization and the public an exact depiction of the weather conditions in the area from which they are observing.”

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Using traditional amateur (HAM) radio and VOIP technologies, the team relays valuable weather tracking information to the National Hurricane Center and local media outlets, who use the information to keep the general public better informed with more accurate weather reports and alerts.





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THE SYSTEM

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The Esprit integrated positioning camera system is mounted to the Storm Education Team’s Chevy Suburban – the only one geared like it in the world, fully loaded with the latest in weather-tracking technology. The high-resolution Esprit has a ‘windshield’ wiper, is pressurized to prevent fogging and will tilt and pan in 90 mph winds, all critical features when capturing footage during hurricanes and thunderstorms.

“The Pelco housings have certainly proven weather-ready under any circumstance we have encountered,” said Danny Musten, Communications Specialist for the team. “The cameras have proven to endure the severe weather punishment as well and certainly have the image quality to share with our broadcast media outlets and use in our educational videos. Having remote tilt, pan and zoom allows us to focus on the action without having to be in the storm’s force.”

Images taken with the Esprit camera are sent to a dedicated Web site for live or recorded video footage. This technology even works when the truck is moving, as long as it is in the coverage area. The team also employs four Pelco ultra-high resolution fixed cameras, which are deployed in the field during storms. The Storm Education Team takes advantage of a Pelco KBD300A Keyboard control to manipulate the camera systems.

Due to a slow hurricane season the past two years, the equipment has not yet been used to capture footage during a storm. However, when an F3 tornado struck Eaglewood, North Carolina, the Esprit was used to shoot video of the debris field.

“Thanks to the camera, we didn’t have to get out and walk into an unknown situation where there might be some unseen danger,” Van Pelt said.

The addition of the telescoping mast gives the team the ability to peer into damaged buildings of up two stories high, an ability which they plan to share with police and fire departments during emergencies to ascertain the safety of a building before entering.

For additional information or to view the Storm Education Team Pelco Esprit Webcam, please visit www.stormstudy.com.



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Pictured from left to right, John Van Pelt and Danny Musten

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