

News Clippings

DATE

Emergency Response

Fort Wayne

Allen sits out statewide digital map

[Read the Article](#)

Fire

Fort Wayne

Verbatim: Fire safety tips for Halloween

[Read the Article](#)

Monticello

Wiring problem ignited warehouse fire

[Read the Article](#)

Walkerton

Investigation continues in Walkerton arson

[Read the Article](#)

Published: October 26, 2009 3:00 a.m.

Allen sits out statewide digital map

Project helps agencies plot out economic development, disaster response

Ron Shawgo

The Journal Gazette

Map funding

The IndianaMap is financially supported by the Indiana departments of Homeland Security and Transportation, the state's Geographic Information Office, the Indiana Geological Survey, the U.S. Geological Survey and Indiana University's University Information Technology Services.

Data for the map are contributed by eight state agencies, including the departments of Natural Resources and Environmental Management; 11 federal agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Indiana counties and others.

A plan that officials say could save lives and improve economic development, disaster response, transportation, water quality and natural resources is receiving near statewide support – but not from Allen County.

Despite an appeal by the Indiana Department of Homeland Security and other state agencies for counties to help address what one official calls "our most pressing needs," Allen County has declined.

All of this over some maps.

More than 80 percent of the state's counties have contributed computerized maps to the IndianaMap initiative. The statewide map is free to anyone, accessible on any office, home or field computer and has unlimited uses.

A study last year showed that the freely available electronic maps pay for their expense many times over in statewide economic development.

But for the kinds of maps the state wants – land parcels, addresses, roads and jurisdiction boundaries – Allen County charges \$15,000.

"That's their decision" to charge a fee, said Jim Sparks, who as the state's geographic information officer is compiling the county maps. "I think there are good business reasons not to support that."

It's not that Allen County does not share maps with the state, especially when security or safety is concerned, said Dave Estes, who manages the county's GIS office. But the issue of offering maps up for anyone to use, he said, boils down to politics and a philosophy that is slowly changing.

Although the average Hoosier might never use them, computerized maps touch nearly all facets of their lives and have become essential for many government agencies.

In its simplest form, mapping software can take a list of addresses – or longitude and latitude points – and show them as dots on a map. On top of that, other map layers, such as those showing floodplains, leaf collection routes or the distances tornado sirens are audible, can be added. Think of TV weather maps that overlay storm fronts on a county road map.

The uses are endless, and there are no better maps than those created by local governments, Sparks said.

Computerized mapping, known as a geographical information system, or GIS, links any information tied to land – addresses, property boundaries, crime statistics, utility lines – to a map. Users can analyze data from various agencies at once and see the results in map form. Trends in traffic or crime patterns, for example, can be determined.

For multiple agencies responding to a disaster, the use of a common, updated map is vital.

Indiana's 2008 flooding, for example, took a coordinated response from local officials, volunteers, Indiana National Guard, local and State Police, federal agencies, the Red Cross and animal rescue, according to the non-profit Indiana Geographic Information Council, the statewide coordinator for Indiana geographic information.

The IndianaMap helped coordinate information.

It also is credited with Honda selecting its plant site in Greensburg. The map's aerial photography – taken in 2005 using state and federal money and available for all counties – allowed Fort Wayne to measure impervious surfaces for accurate stormwater bills, resulting in \$88,000 in increased annual revenue. Both examples and many others are from a fall 2008 Indiana Geographic Information Council newsletter.

A study outlined in that newsletter, conducted by the council and a company owned by a former executive director of the group, found that the initial \$8.5 million investment in the IndianaMap has yielded \$1.7 billion in Indiana projects. Of the 314 users surveyed, 90 percent said they could not do their projects without the state map.

Interestingly, Allen County is a paying member of the Indiana Geographic Information Council, the guiding force behind the IndianaMap.

Allen County brought in nearly \$18,000 selling electronic maps last year and an additional \$27,000 in subscriptions for online access to map data, not enough to cover office expenses, according to county officials.

National studies show that income has never been enough to make GIS departments self-supporting. Of Indiana's 92 counties, only three or four still sell maps to support their GIS efforts, the state's Sparks said.

Selling electronic maps "simply didn't work," said Bernie Beier, director of the Fort Wayne-Allen County Office of Homeland Security, who calls GIS critical to agency decision-making.

"I think that whole model is on its last days," he said.

And there are signs Allen County is coming to that conclusion.

iMap, the county's GIS program and a division of the Department of Planning Services, recently installed an online county map that allows users to obtain property tax information through the county treasurer's Web site. The service is free and replaces an online subscription service.

Also this year, Fort Wayne joined the county board that monitors the iMap office in a joint data-sharing agreement.

The issue of providing free maps is likely to receive a future iMap board vote, said Kevin Holle, geographic information systems manager for the city and a new iMap board member. Holle has an advisory role on the Indiana Geographic Information Council's data sharing committee.

The free online service and expanded iMap board are significant changes in moving toward more open data, said Kim Bowman, director of the joint city-county planning department.

As for the IndianaMap, "Allen County would like very much to participate in it," said Estes, the county's GIS manager.

A county ordinance that sets map fees would have to be voted down by the iMap board. Noting that taxes already largely pay for the GIS office, Estes said whether the county charges for maps or gives them away depends on the political climate.

Asked which he preferred, Estes replied, "Folks pay for it anyway, don't they? ... I don't make the rules."

Allen County Commissioner Linda Bloom acknowledged the income from maps is small and that the newly formed city-county iMap board, which she is on, might eventually take up the issue of contributing to the IndianaMap.

But, she added, it's not a priority to her.

"At this point, no." she said. "We have spent millions on this project over the years."

The state's Sparks believes that all counties will eventually participate in the IndianaMap. Money, he said, is the sticky issue.

"If we were able to get funding to the GIS community," he said, "then I think those kinds of issues would go away."

[Back to Top](#)

Last updated: October 28, 2009 9:17 a.m.

Verbatim: Fire safety tips for Halloween

Statement issued Wednesday:

The Indiana State Fire Marshal wants you and your children to stay safe this Halloween. The following are safety tips about fire, haunted houses and other attractions.

"Ensuring costumes are labeled flame-resistant or flame-retardant is a simple fire safety precaution that Hoosiers can do to make sure Halloween remains a safe holiday," said Indiana State Fire Marshal Jim Greeson.

Fire safety concerns are often unique at haunted houses and other venues typically visited during this time of year. To help parents and children have a safe and fun Halloween, Greeson encourages following these safety tips:

Haunted Houses, corn mazes and other venues

- Make sure the attraction has been inspected. If a sticker indicating inspection is not visible, ask the owner to see a copy.
- Ensure there is enough lighting around doorways, walkways, and any figures in the attraction.
- Locate all exits before entering; all exits should be clearly marked.
- Do not run! Please follow any direction the operator of the attraction gives you.

Costumes

- Buy only costumes, wigs and props labeled flame-resistant or flame-retardant. If you are making your own costumes, choose material that won't easily ignite if it comes into contact with heat or flame. Avoid using billowing or long trailing features.
- If your child is wearing a mask, make sure the eye holes are large enough so their vision is not obstructed.
- Provide children with lightweight flashlights to carry for lighting or as part of their costume.

- Dried flowers, cornstalks and crepe paper are highly flammable. Keep these and other decorations away from all open flames and heat sources, including light bulbs and heaters.
- Use flashlights as alternatives to candles or torch lights when decorating walkways and yards. They are much safer for trick-or-treaters, whose costumes may brush against the lighting.

Tell children to stay away from open flames. Be sure they know how to stop, drop and roll if their clothing catches fire.

Copyright © 2009 The Journal Gazette. All rights reserved. News service copy is used with permission. The information contained in the report may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without the prior written authority of The Journal Gazette or granting news service.

[Back to Fire](#)

November 3, 2009

Wiring problem ignited warehouse fire

Residents warned to keep away from building

MONTICELLO -- Investigators have determined that an electrical problem started a fire that destroyed a Monticello warehouse last week.

According to Chief Shane Swaim of the Monticello Fire Department, the fire that destroyed Hall's Mall at 222 E. Marion St. started in the band saw room of the building due to a wiring issue.

Swaim said the room was located in the center of the building on the ground floor.

"The fire started there and moved throughout the structure," Swaim said.

"We are done with the investigation and the area has been cleared. The building is still unstable and it is still private property, so we are advising people to stay clear."

Investigators from the state fire marshal's office and Monticello Fire Department worked together to determine the cause.

Swaim said he is unaware of any plans to rebuild the structure now that the investigation is complete.

The Monticello Fire Department initially responded to the fire around 7 p.m. Oct. 27. Firefighters from 20 departments worked to get the fire under control by 4 a.m. Wednesday.

Firefighters stopped spraying water on the building around 2:30 p.m. Thursday, more than 43 hours after they arrived. Fire officials said more than 4 million gallons of water were used over the two-day period.

Swaim said firefighters were briefly called back to the scene Thursday night for a flare-up, but that was quickly extinguished.

The approximately 85,000-square-foot business assembled and stored shipping pallets. It was declared a total loss by firefighters.

According to the White County assessor's office, the building has an assessed value of \$309,600.

Attempts to reach owner Quentin Hall for comment in the past week have been unsuccessful.

-- Justin L. Mack/jmack@jconline.com

[Back to Fire](#)



WSBT - News, Weather, Sports South Bend

[Print this article](#)

Investigation continues in Walkerton arson

Originally printed at <http://www.wsbt.com/news/local/68686387.html>

WALKERTON – In a small town, news travels fast. Phyllis Wille said her phone rang off the hook Monday from customers and friends wanting to know what happened at the vacant building next door.

“We just can’t believe that would happen in Walkerton,” said Wille, owner of The New Kitchen Store.

“That really could have hurt somebody,” added Tisha Jacobson-Maher, who owns a nearby bar called the Speakeasy Manor.

State Fire Marshal’s Detective Jeff Roseboom said someone intentionally broke the natural gas line behind the vacant Fireworks Factory building, and then set it on fire around 1 a.m. Monday.

“Whoever did this was also taking a chance by lighting the gas that was coming out, that they did not cause some type of explosion or ignite themselves,” Roseboom explained.

Detectives don’t know the name of the person who noticed the smoke and flames coming from the building in the 600 block of Roosevelt Street, then ran less than a block to the police station rather than dialing 911.

But they do know that person could have saved lives, because the combination of fire and natural gas could have easily caused an explosion.

Two people live in an apartment building above the vacant building that caught fire. Apartments above other downtown buildings were also occupied at the time.

From Roosevelt, passers-by can't see obvious signs of a fire. But the damaged gas meter and partially boarded-up garage door had remnants of smoke and water damage.

"[Firefighters] told us that the whole block could have been gone. They said it was just a miracle that it didn't [blow up]," Wille said.

She also knows how hard she's worked to establish her business in a troubled economy. Wille said losing it would have been "horrid."

"We've only been here a couple years, but it takes a long time to get established in a neighborhood," she said.

Roseboom said he interviewed some witnesses and there are some "persons of interest" in the case.

Detectives are also reviewing surveillance video from the inside of the Speakeasy Manor. The bar was open Sunday night and closed around midnight or 12:30 a.m. — right before the fire was set.

The area behind the bar is used for parking, and detectives want to take a look at who was inside the bar around that time.

Anyone with information about the fire is asked to call the Walkerton Police Department at (574) 586-3511.

[Back to Fire](#)