



CASE STUDY

Keeping Menasha Connected After the Tornado

200+ Emergency Voicemails And No Way To Hear Them

When an EF-3 tornado tore through Menasha, Wisconsin, with winds as fast as 140 mph on July 27, 2026, it destroyed homes, businesses, cars, and the town's fiber connection. As a result, the Public Works Department's voice-over-IP (VoIP) phone system was toast. Community members were calling for help, but no one could answer the calls or even listen to voicemail messages.

WiscNet Emergency Internet Kits, built around Mobile Beacon hotspots, were rushed to Menasha. The first thing city employees did with the hotspots was power up the VoIP system, which revealed more than 200 voicemail messages from residents seeking aid.

When the Fiber Went Down, Everything Went Down

Both the city and the Menasha School District are members of WiscNet, a Research and Education Network (REN) that provides services to public and private higher education, K-12 school districts, libraries, municipalities, and hospitals throughout Wisconsin.

WiscNet's monitoring system initially showed nothing amiss. No alerts had been triggered. But the reports coming out of Menasha were dire enough that Rich Turiel, WiscNet CTO, reached out to check on his members.



The WiscNet Emergency Kits, delivered in rugged waterproof cases.

The city's network and systems manager told him the entire phone system was knocked out. The school district faced an even bigger crisis: All five of its schools were offline, and it would be a month before the fiber was repaired. Teachers were already back, and the school year was only weeks away. With no internet access, school district administrators began to seriously consider delaying the start of school for more than 3,000 students.

Two Pelican Cases and a Phone Call

WiscNet was ready to assist, though. Inspired by a similar kit that fellow REN CENIC built for California wildfire and disaster response, WiscNet had recently built two Emergency Internet Kits – two Pelican cases, one with a Starlink satellite dish with solar power, routers and switches; and one with five of Mobile Beacon's 5G hotspots with unlimited data, Wi-Fi routers, switches, and battery packs.

The kits were brand new. WiscNet staff had met only days earlier to figure out how to introduce the kits to members. Now, they were being used for real. An engineer who was already on the road delivered the kits to Menasha authorities. When the city needed more, WiscNet assembled and delivered another kit with more hotspots on the fly to expand the reach of the emergency connectivity.

Back Online and the School Year Back on Track

The gear, Turiel says, “performed great right out of the box.” Teachers used the connections to prepare for the school year, and the district had enough connectivity in all five schools to go forward without pushing back the start of school. The city used the hotspots until its fiber came back online August 17, 2026, three weeks after the tornado. The district was set to follow the following week.

“We’d be dead in the water without it,” said Andrea Oskey, Network and Systems Administrator for the City of Menasha, told the media shortly after the Emergency Kits were deployed. “We’re able to continue business and help the residents with what they’re going through.”



Image of Kit Interior with Numbered Elements

1. Five Mobile Beacon 5G Hotspots 2. Wi-Fi Routers 3. 24-port switch
4. Extension cable 5. Charger 6. Ethernet cables 7. USB-C to USB-C
cables 8. Paper and pens 9. Battery pack with solar panel

About the Partnership

WiscNet (wiscnet.net) is a member-driven REN that serves schools, colleges, libraries and local governments throughout Wisconsin. Members can use its Emergency Internet Kit as a temporary lifeline after a cyberattack, natural disaster, or building failure takes down a primary internet connection.

Mobile Beacon provides WiscNet and other RENs across the United States with 5G mobile and business-class internet service with unlimited data via T-Mobile's wireless network, along with mobile hotspots and high-performance fixed-location routers.

For more than 15 years, Mobile Beacon, a Rhode Island-based nonprofit, has delivered affordable, premium connectivity that enables mission-driven organizations to bring education, technology, and opportunity to the people they serve. Learn more at mobilebeacon.org.