

# July 31, 2023, LeeCARES Net Training: Good Maps

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This past week I encountered a bad accident on US290 near FM180 near Ledbetter that had traffic backed up a considerable distance. Traffic was being diverted down backroads around the mess. This is not an uncommon experience around Giddings. A busy weekend or a train can have traffic backed up for what seems like forever.

This reminded me of the evacuation of Houston for Hurricane Rita in 2005. This was just after the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina and the fear mobilized everyone. The traffic here was not moving and backed up for miles. The cell towers were jammed, and the local stores were emptied.

During a short-term emergency event, having knowledge of surface streets and backroads can be invaluable. With the heavy burden on local businesses, knowing how to avoid traffic and get to small towns off major evacuation routes can allow you to acquire the supplies you may need. It is also important for us to navigate to locations we may need to deploy to during an activation.

Since 2005, we have become more reliant on our mobile phones for mapping and navigation than ever before. The technology we have in the palm of our hand is amazing, but it is limited by how much traffic the surrounding cell towers can handle. Having a good map and the ability to navigate with it is imperative.

Today, we have access to lots of map sources, but most of these are online. Bookmark as many sources as you can find and download them as well. It is also a good idea to get paper maps too. Atlases are a great way to get lots of maps in one place. There is a great Mapsco Atlas of the Roads of Texas, which is an excellent resource for backroads, however, the latest edition runs about \$80 currently on Amazon.

Maps can also be downloaded to your mobile device and the GPS on board will still guide you even while in airplane mode. Google Maps allows this for free. You can also purchase GPS apps such as onX or Gaia GPS. I have used Gaia GPS in airplane mode in remote Utah and New Mexico with excellent results.

Along with good maps, you will need to have a quality compass on hand. Again, we have this technology on our phones, but it can fail. I keep a button compass on my watch band and a regular compass along with me. Being able to orient yourself and your map is the start of good navigation.

I have included links to a few excellent sources for maps and road conditions below. I am sure others are available out there. Keep these on hand and use the opportunity of traffic situations to practice your map skills to navigate around trouble spots. You never know when it will be needed.

## Sources for Maps:

**Lee County Map** <https://www.co.lee.tx.us/upload/page/5440/Commissioners%202022%20Large.pdf>

**TX DOT Travel Maps** <https://www.txdot.gov/data-maps/official-travel-maps.html>

**DeLorme Atlas & Gazetteer: Texas** <https://a.co/d/h1g27PQ>

**The Roads of Texas** <https://a.co/d/gieKUGd>

**Topo Maps** <https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#10/30.2751/-96.8980>

## Apps

**GaiaGPS** <https://www.gaiagps.com/>

**onX** <https://www.onxmaps.com/>

## Other Sources for Road Conditions:

**Bluebonnet Electric Outage Map** <http://outage.bluebonnetelectric.coop:82/>

**Drive Texas** <https://drivetexas.org/>

**ATX Floods** <https://www.atxfloods.com/>