

## *What is GIS?*

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a piece of software that is used to display specific geographic points or a geographic area over a map. Catastrophe Services distributes data (commonly referred to as data sets) daily, depicting severe weather and man made losses to its members. During the severe weather season this data normally consists of “point data” that shows members where reports of tornadoes, high wind and large hail were received by the National Weather Service’s network of trained severe weather spotters. This point data is the latitude and longitude of where the event was reported to the National Weather Service.

Polygon data is the other type of GIS dataset distributed by Catastrophe Services. Instead of consisting of points on a map, this dataset overlays a polygon on the map. Examples of polygon data are hurricane wind fields, wildland fires and precipitation data showing areas of heavy rainfall.

The user takes the data provided by Catastrophe Services and loads it into their GIS software and then overlays their policy holder data. This gives the member a real time view of where the event took place in relationship to their insured.

A full featured GIS application (PLRB Desktop Mapper, ESRI’s ArcMap and Mapinfo Professional) allows the Member to create buffers or query this data to realize the immediate impact on their insured. A buffer creates a circle of predetermined distance around the insured so Members can see, for example, how many tornadoes or hail events occurred near their insured. A query allows Members to list how many events occurred in a particular ZIP code, county or even state. All of these reports can be exported from the GIS software into popular office applications like Microsoft Access or Microsoft Excel so further data manipulation can be performed.

Free software applications called GIS viewers are available to display the above data but Members can only view the data and normally cannot perform queries, buffers or export the data to third party applications.

Additional information on the PLRB Desktop Mapper can be obtained by contacting Hugh Strawn, VP – Catastrophe Services at: [hstrawn@plrb.org](mailto:hstrawn@plrb.org).

Additional information on ESRI ArcMap can be found at:

<http://www.esri.com>

Additional information on Mapinfo Professional can be found at:

<http://www.mapinfo.com>

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ESRI's free GIS software viewer, called ArcExplorer can be downloaded at:

<http://www.esri.com/software/arcexplorer/>

Mapinfo's free GIS software viewer, called Proviewer can be downloaded at:

<http://extranet.mapinfo.com/products/Overview.cfm?productid=1062>

Instructions for using ESRI's Arcexplorer to view PLRB Catastrophe Services data can be found here:

<http://www.plrb.org/cats/arcexplorer/arcexplorer.htm>

If your staff has any questions about how to utilize the GIS data that Catastrophe Services provides, please feel free to contact us.

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