

BAAM helps George weather a storm

GEORGE NEWS - In an effort to develop climate-resilient communities, Santam has handed over a completed installation of an Early Warning Disaster (EWD) System and polycom - a state-of-the-art electronic message billboard - to the George Municipality on Wednesday 11 September.

The handover marks part of the Eden Study, a research study on how climate change effects local communities. The system will assist with the transmission of warnings of severe weather conditions and disaster notifications.

The polycom, which is linked to the Eden Disaster Management Centre in George, has been installed in Sandkraal Road and will give the local community and businesses access to emergency messages and alerts in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa.

"With one of the worst years for weather-related catastrophes behind South Africans in 2012, damaging floods hitting Cape Town in August and Santam's crop insurance business adversely impacted by hail damage to summer crops in the eastern region of the country earlier this year, the need to develop climate-resilient communities is critical," says Ray-ann Sedres, head of Integrated Sustainability at Santam.

Extreme weather conditions are becoming the norm and Santam believes it is important for the South African insurance industry to develop meaningful ways of working with local and national government and for authorities to help communities to deal with an increasing number of weather disasters.

"Municipalities are at the face of communities and bear the responsibility of managing the ramifications of a disaster when it strikes. For this reason we're part of the Business-Adopt-A-Municipality (BAAM) initiative, a strategic partnership with the South African Local Government Association (Salga) and the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG)," says Sedres.

The BAAM initiative aims to assist municipalities to improve service delivery and provide support when communities are affected by fires and floods and other catastrophes. The Eden District Municipality is one of five municipalities participating in the BAAM initiative sponsored by Santam and the short-term insurer donated much needed firefighting equipment to each municipality earlier this year and is currently rolling out firefighting training with the support of the Fire Protection Association of Southern Africa (FPASA).

Santam conducted the Eden Study research in 2011 in the Southern Cape, where insurers have experienced an increase in losses due to volatile weather conditions. The study was conducted in collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The broadcast alerts will also benefit the greater community of George with Sandkraal Road being a popular taxi route linking to the N2.

Another polycom will be installed in a further location in the Eden district later in the year.

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