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Case study: Locations of structurally deficient bridges

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Case study: Locations of structurally deficient bridges

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Case (for presentation to students)

The Federal Highway Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation maintains a national inventory of over 600,000 bridges. States are responsible for conducting periodic inspections of bridges and to report their condition to the FHWA. In response to requests from “non-governmental sources” the FHWA will disclose records from the bridge inventory, but not the locations of individual bridges (which are recorded as latitude and longitude coordinates). Following the collapse of a bridge in an urban area that caused several fatalities and dozens of injuries, the GISP receives a telephone inquiry from a reporter who wishes to map structurally deficient bridges in his state.

References

Federal Highway Administration Public Disclosure of National Bridge Inventory (NBI) Data
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/nbi/20070517.cfm>

Resources for teachers

Suggested discussion points

1. How should the GISP respond? Should they provide the data or refer to their supervisor or the FHWA?
2. Should a map be provided?
3. If the GISP feels personally that they have information that is being purposely withheld from the public, should they release the information to the reporter?
4. If a map is generated, how accurate should it be in terms of positional and attribute accuracy?

Relevant GISCI Rule of Conduct

Section I, Number 4: "We shall hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public."

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