INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FACT SHEET

Red Cross survey statistics

In July 2012, the American Red Cross conducted a survey online and via telephone. Their findings included the following:

- One in five Americans have used an app for emergency information

- Mobile apps and social media are tied as the fourth most popular source for emergency information during a disaster.

- Forty percent would use social tools to tell others they are safe.

Why social media?

Using social media for disaster preparedness and response provides the same benefits as using these tools during non-emergency situations. Agencies are able to reach a large audience quickly, control the information they put out, and do all of this with a sense of immediacy. During a crisis situation, these tools offer additional benefits that make them attractive to public safety communicators. During and after a disaster, it is not uncommon for traditional modes of communication, such as land-line telephone service and television news, to be unavailable. In addition, people may be displaced and therefore not have access to such devices. Social media is accessible through mobile devices, allowing people to take the information with them wherever they go. People may also receive these notifications via text message, a function that may be available when broadband and other cell phone connectivity is low.

Social media also gives the public an opportunity to be agency advocates, to be the eyes, ears, and voice of the agency before, during, and after an emergency. By providing information through social media, agencies make it easier for the public to share the information, exponentially increasing the number of people who receive these messages.

Social media for preparedness

Let community members know where they will be able to find information in case of an emergency, by using social media long before a disaster strikes. If community members know that an agency's Twitter stream is a reliable place to find information, they will be likely to go there later when they need details. Establishing this sense of reliability must happen before a disaster strikes. Agencies can also use social media channels to disseminate preparedness information. It is likely that your agency has already created and vetted preparedness content, so the only task left is to place it on social media sites. Check out other emergency management agencies to see how they are using social media as a platform to share preparedness information.

Tweeting preparedness tips and other useful information will help community members make good decisions before and after a disaster. Other social media outlets such as Facebook and blogs also provide suitable platforms for preparedness education. YouTube, Flickr, and other media-sharing sites can be the perfect place to use photos and videos to show people, not just tell them, what to do in case of an emergency.

Social media for response

After a disaster strikes, agencies may turn to social media for many different uses.

Agencies are able to build situational awareness by monitoring what is being said and shared through social media channels. The public may be sharing valuable information that could help guide efforts and save lives. Look for patterns or truth clusters to help direct relief efforts. Monitoring can also reveal when inaccurate information is being shared and allow agencies an opportunity to respond with accurate information.

Social media can also be used to disseminate up-to-date information. For example, an agency may let people know where they can go for safety and resources. It is also important for agencies to know what resources are available for them to tap into or direct people to for more information. An example is Google Crisis Response, which brings together multiple types of data including the Google Person Finder. This creates a resource for people directly affected by a disaster as well as those seeking information about loved ones or ways to help. Another example is the American Red Cross Shelter View app, which provides vital information on services available in a community.

All of these resources are extremely beneficial, but the strategy should start early with preparedness. People should be educated about these resources before a disaster strikes, so they will have the tools to be informed in case of an emergency.