

Social Media Use During Disasters

By: Laura Thiesen (LEPC Chair)

A disaster which might be an incident such as flooding, fire, extreme weather, earthquake, or volcanic eruption could strike at any time and may leave many unanswered questions. **Where will you turn for information?**

Effective communication during a disaster is vital. It allows an organization to possibly prevent, prepare, and respond to a disaster before, during and after the event has occurred. Social media (i.e. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.) is user-generated content distributed through the Internet with the intent to share and facilitate conversations between users. Social media is one of the major methods of social interaction around the world today and is quickly becoming the most efficient outlet for disaster response.

Social networking sites can serve many uses throughout disaster relief. Social networking sites can gather information in a central location, and serve as a resource to understand the magnitude or severity of a disaster. As social media continues to be used during a crisis, people can receive more information about the disaster regardless of their location to the disaster.

In a disaster situation, information must be spread quickly to people affected by the disaster, as well as, to those responding to the disaster. Social media platforms provide new routes of information flow and a means to assist those in need of information during a disaster. Social media can also serve as an effective route of communication for governments to reach individuals and communities, and alert responders to where and what type of relief is needed.

Social media has proven to help coordinate and facilitate assistance in disaster relief efforts. Disaster responders can use social media during a disaster to track volunteers, to help reconnect families, and to spread critical information. Also, in a disaster, social media can be used as an alternative way to call for help. If cell phone service is lost, one may still be able to access the internet to relay critical information to family and friends.

Facebook's **Safety Check** is an example of how social media might work when a major disaster hits. The feature will push a notification to the smart phones of users in the affected area. It will prompt them to click a button that says either "I'm safe" or "I'm not in the area." That update will go on their Facebook news feeds, and will also be collected in a database where friends and family can search in order to check on loved ones.

The Copper River LEPC (Local Emergency Planning Committee) has a Facebook page, **Copper River LEPC**. We would like to encourage those with access to Facebook to “Like” this page before disaster strikes.

Your Local Emergency Planning Committee is coordinated by Libby Bengtson and chaired by Laura Thiesen (822-3203). The committee invites everyone to attend our monthly meetings. If you are interested, please call Libby or Laura or visit our Facebook page.