Emergency Management and Response - Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC)

The InfoGram

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Social media vs. 9-1-1: make sure you and your community are ready

According to a number of sources, some Texas and Florida residents used social media to report emergencies during Hurricanes Harvey and Irma because they couldn't get through to 9-1-1. In some cases emergency workers were able to respond but in other cases, good Samaritans who saw the pleas for help online organized and responded first.

The good news is that, according to the Federal Communications Commission, communications systems held up well. Only 4 percent of the cell sites in Hurricane Harvey's path were knocked out, which is an improvement over the more than 1,000 cell sites knocked out during Hurricane Katrina. This implies the problems were more about call volume than inability to connect.

This poses a number of problems for emergency managers to consider when planning for future disasters:

- How can the 9-1-1 system be bolstered to handle a very high call volume?
- How to ensure the populace knows to not rely on social media but to call 9-1-1?
- What to do if and when citizens self-deploy and potentially make an already bad situation worse?
- How to identify duplication when people put calls for help out on both platforms?
- How to handle social media calls for help now that you know you **will** get them?

The changing way society uses technology has forced governments and first responders to adapt. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma will transform the way emergency communications happen, both through technology and the people-factor. Strategies about handling these changes should be decided well before they are needed.

(Source: Various)

Drone use reaches "landmark level" in Harvey disaster response

After Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued 127 authorizations for emergency drone use. This is an unprecedented number for such an event, and experts in both the unmanned aerial system (UAS) industry and disaster response believe this will usher in a new era of such use in disasters.

Examples of UAS use in Harvey recovery include energy and water companies inspecting their facilities and pipelines, insurance companies remotely inspecting damage and government agencies using them to inspect roads, bridges, and levees. Much of this work was contracted with UAS companies to complete.

First responders used UAS in search and rescue, 3D mapping, and to identify hazards or structural damage before sending personnel into questionable areas. According to this report from ABC, more than 300 state and local agencies across the country have UAS programs. Using a drone is around 400 times cheaper than having a helicopter in the air, a very strong advantage for small governments and first responder departments who are already strapped for funding.

Highlights

U.S. Fire Administration

The InfoGram is distributed weekly to provide members of the Emergency Services Sector with information concerning the protection of their critical infrastructures.

During a disaster, it is important to make a distinction between UAS used for official response and recovery efforts and hobbyist activity, of which there was plenty in Texas. There were also many civilians with UAS that wanted to help without being a sanctioned member of a response entity. Unapproved UAS use in a disaster zone is hazardous to all other aircraft in operation; jurisdictions need to decide how they will handle these issues well before a disaster strikes.

(Source: FAA)

The mechanics of national wildfire response

Areas of the western United States have seen a very active wildfire season this year. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) reports over 8.2 million acres burned as of September 13, making this the third worst wildfire season in the past 10 years, and the season isn't over yet.

The west is not exclusive in its wildfire activity, but many areas of the country may not be equipped or trained to handle a large wildfire. Most of the time, wildfires are contained within a few days. If one really takes off in a jurisdiction not used to managing a serious wildfire, they may need to quickly call for additional resources.

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) briefly lays out the three levels of wildfire response in their latest Coffee Break Bulletin, which consists of local, geographical area, and national response. Each level brings access to more agencies, resources, and people to respond to the emergency.

For more information on the current wildfire outlook and to learn about the Geographical Area Coordination Centers, visit the NIFC website.

(Source: NIFC)

Cybersecurity insurance: what you need to know

One of the biggest risks to government entities currently is cyberattack. Every day, hackers are attempting to break into networks to steal data and wreak havoc. The rate of cyberattacks continues to increase every year, and governments at all levels need to come to terms with the fact that data breaches are now a fact of life.

As often happens when new risks take hold, another industry has appeared to address the problem. Cybersecurity Insurance has been available for over 10 years, but many government agencies still don't know of its existence. It helps entities breached in an attack manage the costs associated with recovery. Depending on the policy chosen, this can cover forensic data investigation, losses, lawsuits and extortion.

Interested agencies can learn more about the true impact of a cyber breach and the need for cybersecurity insurance in an upcoming webinar on Friday, September 15, 2017, from 1-2 p.m. Eastern. The webinar link is: https://share.dhs.gov/c3vprc3slttgcc/. The dial-in number is 1-888-394-4822; PIN: 6928838. The webinar will also feature state and local government panelists and discuss tools and resources available to help organizations decrease their risk.

(Source: DHS)

DHS and the FBI encourage recipients of this document to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to the local FBI office and also the State or Major Urban Area Fusion Center.

For information specifically affecting the private sector critical infrastructure contact the **National Infrastructure Coordinating Center** by phone at **202-282-9201,** or by email at **nicc@dhs.gov.**

The U.S. Fire Administration maintains the Emergency Management and Response – Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC). For information regarding the EMR-ISAC visit www.usfa.dhs.gov/emr-isac or contact the EMR-ISAC office at: (301) 447-1325 and/or emr-isac@fema.dhs.gov.