



## The Use of Social Media In Disaster Response

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## DomPrep Survey

# The Use of Social Media in Disaster Response

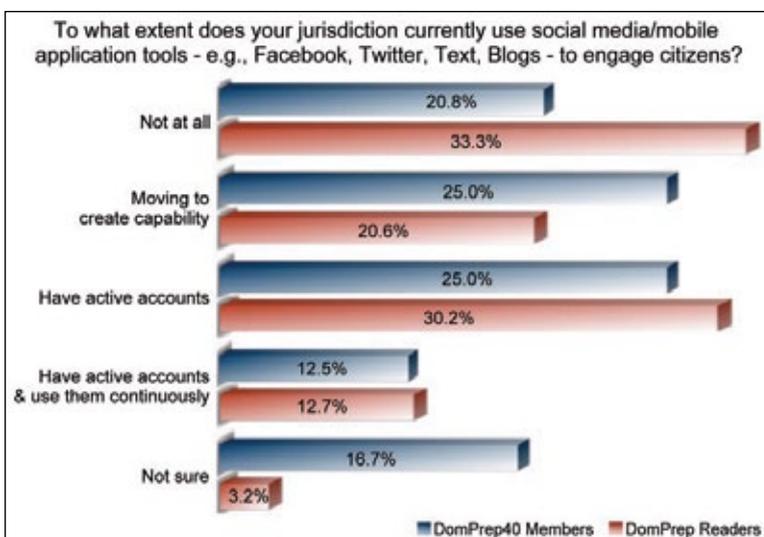
Prepared by Joseph Becker, Senior Vice President, Disaster Services, American Red Cross; Summarized by John F. Morton, DP40



“There has been a lot of discussion in the disaster sector on the use of social media and mobile applications for preparedness and response,” says DomPrep40 member Joseph C. Becker, senior vice president of disaster services at the American Red Cross (ARC). In leading the ARC’s responses to recent disasters, Becker has seen the potential of social media to greatly improve the way people in need connect with those who can help. The recent Haiti response is a case in point where service improved as a result – and led Becker to question what implications such use poses for policies and procedures, both for response organizations and governments.

Cities, counties, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been using social media as an additional means to interact, both prior to a disaster and during the event itself. “I am particularly concerned over how social media create an expectation for expressing need when they become the surrogate ‘9-1-1’ when regular services, voice communications, are disrupted by a disaster,” says Becker. If text services and the Internet remain intact, then the key question is how jurisdictions and rescue services can tie into texting and mobile social media applications – which the users assume will link into a back-end response system that delivers. “The problem in Haiti was that in many cases there was no mechanism for an expression of need by text to connect with organizations that could help,” says Becker.

Becker drafted this survey for the DP40 and *DomPrep* members to assess their opinions on the use of social media in disaster response. The issues are important and may require the setting of policies – particularly in view of the legal ramifications involved with regard to liability.

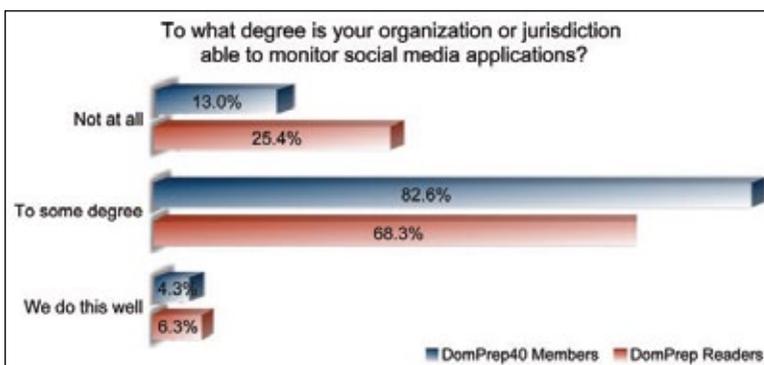


**Key Findings:** DomPrep readers and experts agree: The use of social media in disasters is increasing. But organizations and jurisdictions do not have adequate capability and scalability to connect urgent requests via social media to response units. Liability issues need to be addressed.

## Survey Results

Over 60 percent of DomPrep40 members and readers say that their jurisdictions are using social media tools to some degree in disaster response.

More than 80 percent of DP40 members and just under three out



of four readers say that their organization or jurisdiction has at least some ability to monitor social media apps.

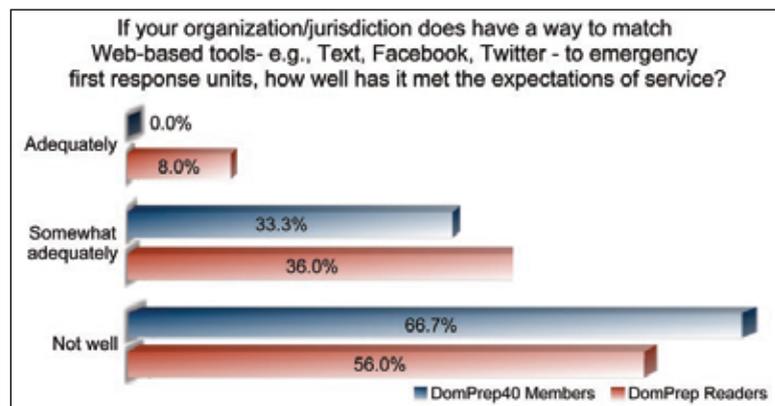
The table below represents the responses of the DP40 members and the *DomPrep* readers to a series of questions. The following conclusions, based on their responses, became apparent. Approximately 90 percent in both groups say the use of social media drives the expectation among citizens that they are communicating with responders in ways that will facilitate a timely response. If true, this assumption on the part of victims in a major disaster could have seriously negative consequences if an organization or jurisdiction cannot deliver. Three out of four in both groups say that they are not aware that victims are indeed using social media to convey urgent requests for assistance.

This result would indicate a belief that victims may in fact continue to rely on traditional channels such as 9-1-1. It does not, however, reflect the thinking on use and expectations if traditional channels are down – Becker’s point. A key policy issue here would be the need to address the demographic implications – responders could be drawn to map

the “topography” of the disaster in accordance with the traffic generated by social media, to the detriment of urgent needs not conveyed by those without access to social media-capable devices. *DomPrep* readers agree with DP40 members on this question as well. With a tally of more than nine out of ten, both groups say that their organizations or jurisdictions do not have a way to connect urgent requests via social media to responders. Readers have validated the key finding of the *DomPrep*40.

Agreement again, with just over nine in ten saying they are not staffed to monitor social media apps and respond in a major event. Here we have slightly more optimism among readers on this crucial liability issue. Whereas 86 percent of the DP40 say that their organizations have not considered the liability issues that might result from receiving urgent requests via social media and being unable to respond adequately, the percentage for readers totaled somewhat lower, at 77.4 percent.

	DomPrep40 Members		DomPrep Readers	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you believe that the engagement of social media by an organization or government elevates citizens' expectations of both dialogue and a timely response?	87.5%	12.5%	92.1%	7.9%
In your jurisdiction, have you been aware of instances of urgent requests for emergency assistance that have been conveyed by these alternate means?	26.1%	73.9%	20.6%	79.4%
Does your organization or jurisdiction have a way to match urgent requests for assistance from Web applications to first-response units?	8.7%	91.3%	8.2%	91.8%
Is your organization/jurisdiction adequately staffed to scale its ability to monitor Web applications & respond to the large number of requests during a mass-casualty event?	9.1%	90.9%	11.1%	88.9%
Has your organization/jurisdiction explored the legal ramifications involved in receiving urgent requests for emergency assistance from Web applications if it is not currently configured to handle such requests?	13.6%	86.4%	22.6%	77.4%



Where DP40 members and readers do have a means to connect social media tools to responders, over 60 percent of both groups say it has not been done well.

# Social Media in Disasters and Emergencies

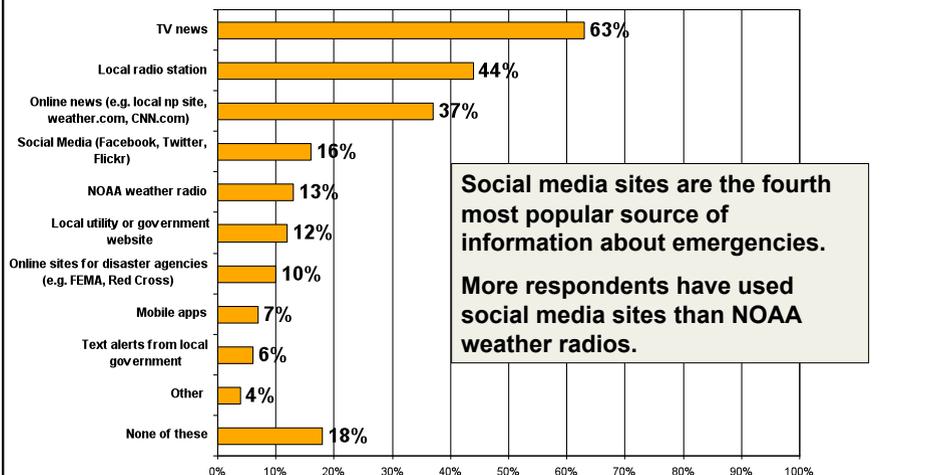
Online Survey of 1,058 respondents representative of the US population aged 18 and older, conducted by Infogroup | ORC on July 22-23, 2010. Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have volunteered to participate in online surveys and polls. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the 18+ population. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Report Date: August 5, 2010



1

## One in six (16%) have used social media to get information about an emergency



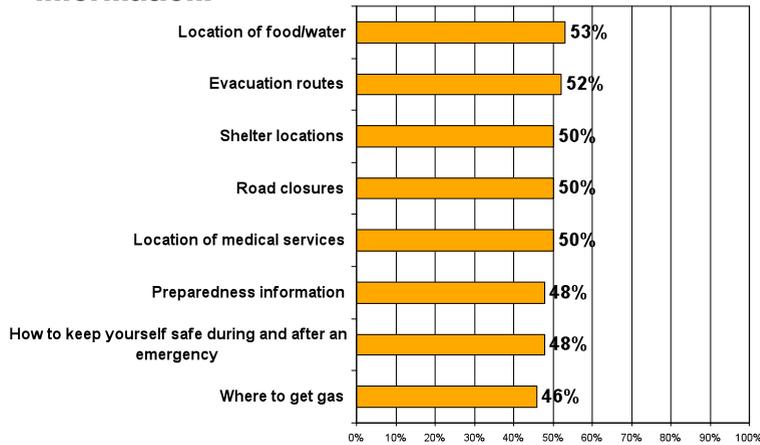
**Social media sites are the fourth most popular source of information about emergencies. More respondents have used social media sites than NOAA weather radios.**

Which of the following communication channels have you ever used to get information about an emergency such as a power outage, severe weather, flash flood, hurricane, earthquake, or tornado?



2

**About half of respondents would sign up for emails, text alerts, or applications to receive any of the emergency information.**



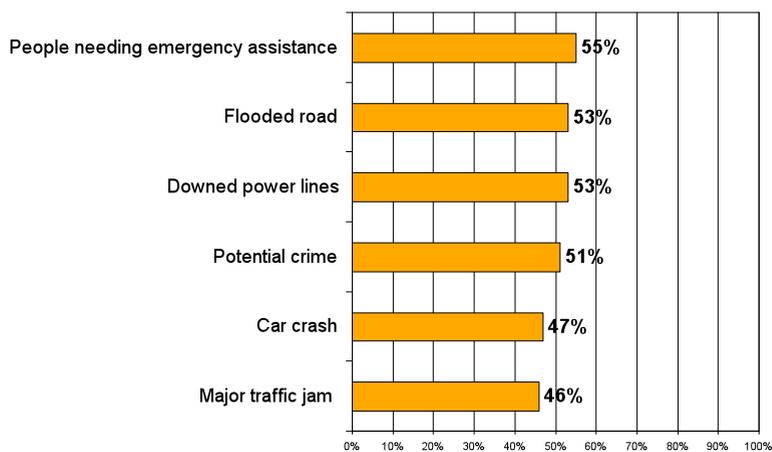
How likely would you be to sign up for emails, text alerts, or applications that provided you with the following information in an emergency? Percentages indicate those who probably or definitely would.



3

**About half of respondents would mention any of the emergencies or events on their social media channels.**

Base is the 72% who use at least one social media channel (online community or social network).



If you came across the following emergencies or newsworthy events, how likely would you be to mention them on your social media channels? Percentages indicate those who probably or definitely would.



4

## If 911 was busy, what would they do?

(All respondents)

### Who would they try to reach?

- Police - 39%
- Fire department – 19%
- Family, friends or neighbors – 16%
- Hospital-10%

### How?

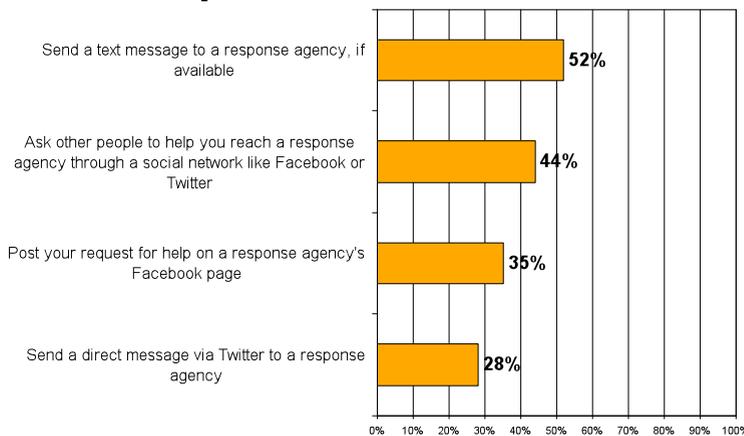
- Phone or cell phone – 42%
- Digital media – 18%
- Walk or drive – 16%
- Text message – 4%

Imagine that someone you knew needed urgent help in an area-wide emergency. You have repeatedly dialed 911 and gotten a busy signal. How else would you try to contact emergency responders? Whom would you try to contact and how? (Open-ended)



5

## More than half would send a text message to an available response agency if someone they knew needed help.

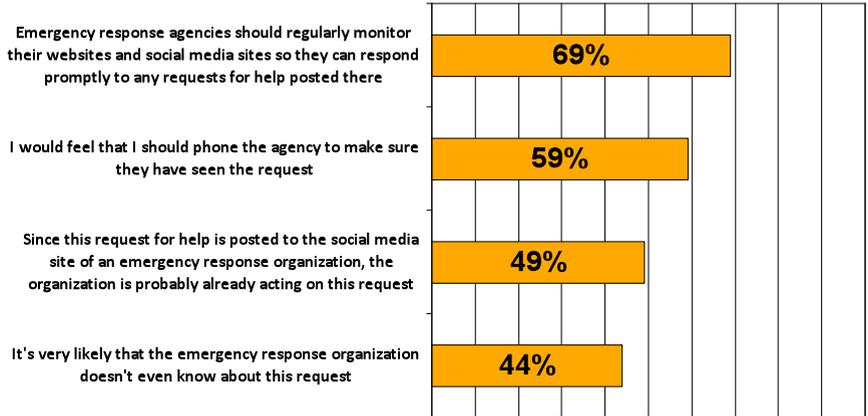


If someone you knew needed urgent help in an area-wide emergency, would you try to request help in any of the following ways? (Percent indicates those who definitely or probably would.)



6

**More than two-thirds agree that response agencies should regularly monitor and respond to postings on their websites.**

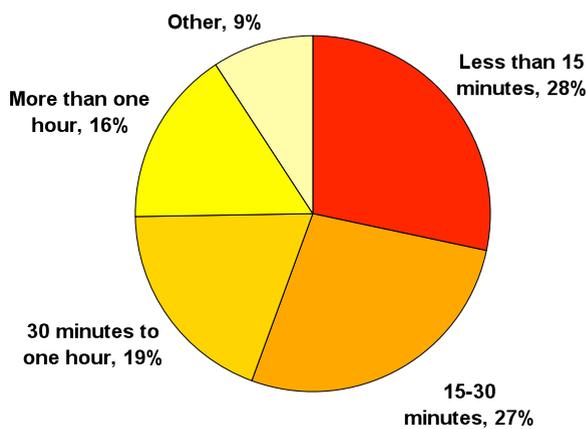


Imagine that you are on a social media site for an emergency response organization such as FEMA or the American Red Cross and you see a recent post that includes an urgent request for help. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Percentages indicate Strongly Agree and Agree)



7

**Three out of four would expect help to arrive within an hour of posting to a social media site**



If you posted a request for help to a social media website, how long do you think it should reasonably take for help to arrive?



8

Suzanne C. DeFrancis slides to accompany her presentation



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