

DHS Science and Technology Directorate

Social Media Working Group for Emergency Services and Disaster Management

Background and Purpose

Social media and collaborative technologies have become critical components of emergency preparedness, response and recovery. From the international response efforts after major tsunamis to hurricane recovery in major U.S. cities, many government officials now turn to social media technologies to share information and connect with citizens during all phases of a crisis. Implementing these technologies, however, requires responding agencies to adopt new communication strategies and engagement methods.

Recognizing the need to address these challenges, the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate established a virtual social media working group (VSMWG) in 2010. After Public Law 114-80 passed, the VSMWG was re-named the Social Media Working Group for Emergency Services and Disaster Management (SMWGESDM). The mission of the SMWGESDM is to provide recommendations to the emergency preparedness and response community on the safe and sustainable use of social media technologies before, during and after emergencies. The SMWGESDM is a subcommittee of the S&T Homeland Security Science and Technology Advisory Committee.



Social media includes social networking sites, photo and video-sharing, blogging and microblogging, location-based check-in tools and more. (Photo Credit: www.designrfix.com)

Meet the SMWGESDM

Drawn from a cross-section of subject matter experts representing federal, tribal, territorial, state and local responders from across the U.S., members establish and collect best practices and solutions that can be leveraged by public safety officials and responders throughout the nation's emergency response community.

SMWGESDM members include: non-profit organizations; local fire, emergency medical services and police; local and county emergency management and public health; academia

and several federal agencies. The SMWGESDM meets virtually every other month. Members contribute their knowledge and expertise to the meeting topic and discussion, and provide information for the SMWGESDM reports and documents.

Activities

Since 2010, the SMWGESDM has published seven guidance documents with input from the first responder community, group members and partners. These documents are available on S&T's website and include:

- [Social Media Strategy](#) – high-level introduction to social media, its benefits for public safety and best practices from agencies already using social media tools;
- [Next Steps Strategy](#) – presents challenges and provides best practices for agencies developing and implementing social media;
- [Community Engagement and Social Media Best Practices](#) – best practices for public safety agencies and partner organizations on how to use social media to successfully engage community members and stakeholders;
- [Lessons Learned – Social Media and Hurricane Sandy](#) – overview of how social media was used to prepare for, respond to and recover from Hurricane Sandy;
- [Using Social Media for Enhanced Situational Awareness and Decision Support](#) – examples of how agencies currently leverage social media to enhance situational awareness and support operational decision-making;
- [From Concept to Reality – Operationalizing Social Media](#) – addresses the need for integration of social media into all aspects of preparedness, response and recovery, and how to operationalize social media in emergency response; and
- [Best Practices for Incorporating Social Media into Exercises](#) – how to integrate social media into exercises to help first responders prepare for real-life events where the public increasingly uses social media to share and gather information.

SMWGESDM members have presented at conferences and events, and participate in numerous exercises and experiments, including the Joint Interagency Field Exploration and the Canada-U.S. Enhanced Resiliency Experiment series.

The SMWGESDM is working on its next report on countering rumors and misinformation on social media in disasters and emergencies.