

Philosophical Differences in Information Access: Command and Control Versus Social Media

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In reviewing minutes from previous workgroup meetings, there is a fundamental underlying philosophical difference in how information is handed by emergency managers in contrast to social media technologies.

- Emergency managers utilize and share information that is reliable and vetted, and that flows in a “chain of command” (SEMS/NIMS and Public Information Officers).
- Social media technologies facilitate immediacy and horizontal sharing of information across peer networks.

This philosophical difference must be acknowledged and addressed in information flow design, otherwise dialogues between emergency managers and Web 2.0 technology experts will misinterpret each other’s perspective and miss the opportunity to engage.

Recent disasters underscore the importance of collaboration among public/governmental, businesses, and NGO/CBO sectors to effectively mobilize and deploy massive resources required to respond to a major disaster in a timely manner:

- Businesses want to donate and deploy resources, but don’t know who needs them or how these resources can be deployed. The private sector also often needs situational awareness information, such as the status of infrastructure, for employee safety, business continuity and economic recovery.
- Non-profits, such as humanitarian relief organizations, need resources from the private sector, but also need situational awareness information to deploy volunteers and establish supply chains, such as we saw during the recent Haiti earthquake.

A key consideration in designing information flow is to recognize that: information currently flows within sector silos; there are de facto “perimeters” created by the use of existing information tools; and that information can and should be shared across sectors to improve collaboration and multi-sector response. Liaisons can be established to communicate information across sector perimeters, for example.

Social media technologies can be utilized to facilitate horizontal information sharing at two levels:

- Among emergency managers in government, non-profit, and business sectors to facilitate cross-sector coordination and resource flow.
- Among the public, such as community-level groups such as CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams) and neighborhood social networks.
- Information can and should flow across levels and sectors – for example, responders need granular situational awareness that can be provided by neighborhood social networks.



Types of information that can and should be shared:

- Situational awareness – damage, shelter locations, infrastructure status, etc.
- Resource needs and providers/donors – including establishing spontaneous supply chains so that the resource can get to where it’s needed most.
- Sharing of guidance, policy responses, etc. – such as benchmarking social distancing measures during pandemics.

The California Resiliency Alliance (CRA) is a not-for-profit public-private partnership, formerly the Bay Area partnership of Business Executives for National Security (BENS), to strengthen state and local capacity to prevent, protect, respond and recover from natural and human-caused disasters.