

NPSTC Town Hall - Public Safety Use of Social Media in Disaster Events
Wednesday, January 24, 2018
12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Eastern time zone

The following questions were submitted by the audience during the recent NPSTC Town Hall on the increasing use of social media by public safety during disaster events. Unfortunately we were unable to address them during the meeting due to time constraints. The questions were forwarded to our panel members and the questions and answers are provided below.

Thank you to all of our participants that submitted questions, and again to our panel members.

Question #1 -

I have noticed that well-meaning people comment on FB and spread misinformation. When should a PSAP or other PS Agency disable commenting on posts?

Michelle Guido: We rarely, if ever, disable comments on posts. And we don't delete comments. On Facebook, we do "hide" comments from time to time, and on Twitter, I will use the "Mute" function sometimes.

Daron Wyatt: We have never disabled commenting. Instead, we are proactive in responding to comments and deliberate in correcting the misinformation. The harder issue is well-meaning resident groups who spread misinformation on their sites. We try to make contact with the admins of those pages and keep them on board.

Mark Economou: We have studied this and discussed it at length and have all agreed that we will never disable comments. Facebook and other social media are just that, social. Connecting and communicating and interacting are what makes these platforms excel and get people to interact with you. With that said there are a few things you can do. Under settings on Facebook in general, there are two options one is the profanity filter. We have that set to high, below that are words you can add yourself, we have included dozens of words in that filter. So if someone comments with any of those words or curses those remarks are hidden. We NEVER delete comments as the ACLU has challenged government agencies on that and those agencies have lost as a violation of your first amendment rights to free speech. What we do though is "Hide" the comments. Right next to the comment is a drop down arrow and you can hide. What that does is hides it from everyone else except the person who posted it.

Question #2 -

Under ICS, the Incident Commander typically "approves" the content of any Media Advisory or other information release from an incident. The 2006 Sago Mine disaster showed that renegade release of the news that all the miners survived resulted in agency embarrassment in addition to family heartbreak.

➤ **What controls are in place to assure the accuracy of info released?**

Michelle Guido: Typically in big breaking news situations, we run the first tweet (the initial release of information) by the incident commander or the Chief, and then we tend to take it from there and release information using our best judgment.

Daron Wyatt: Any info released should be vetted through the Incident Commander/Unified Commanders prior to release. If someone goes rogue and releases erroneous info that is inaccurate, it needs to be corrected ASAP and the process needs to be reiterated with all responsible for the release of information.

Mark Economou: All I can say to this is control who releases information, but unfortunately in a large scale event that includes multiple agencies sometime that is hard as everyone has sources and tops. We make sure only the 2 PIO's and the Chief release information from our agency. We make sure it's accurate and comes from only us.

➤ **As Hawaii learned this month, is there a quick "undo" capability if the info is wrong?**

Michelle Guido: The right thing to do is to immediately correct what is wrong. It's not just deleting the bad information but saying - UPDATE: Earlier information was incomplete; here is what we can tell you now (or however you want to phrase it)

Daron Wyatt: That really depends on the platform the info is released on. Facebook posts can be edited, but Twitter posts can only be deleted. Different WEA platforms have different rules depending on the platform and its capabilities.

Mark Economou: Unfortunately in social media there is no "undo" button. Yes on Facebook and twitter you can quickly delete something posted but usually and especially in large scale events even if you do that it's too late as many share and retweet the info. That is why it is very important you have someone on social media as soon as the incident happens and if you see false information spreading to post corrections or the right information. No longer can we wait for the "investigation" to be complete. Today we need to put out the information first and be the voice behind it. The conversation will happen with our without us, so make sure we are the voice of information.

Question #3:

During a recent webinar about the CAUSE V exercise, they talked about digital volunteer teams that monitored social media during the exercise. To Michael's point about having sufficient support, are there opportunities to develop or foster digital volunteer teams made up of people across the nation that can monitor social media real-time and provide updates to PIOs?

Note from NPSTC: Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOST) is an international community. More information is available at - <https://vosg.us/blog/author/admin/>

Michelle Guido: That would be great, but honestly, I would be more comfortable handing over that kind of control to someone I knew personally and trusted. Therefore, for me, I would rather have those teams in place on a regional basis.

Daron Wyatt: This is new to me and I would be concerned about how to background someone assigned to a “virtual team.”

Mark Economou: Yes. Here in South Florida we have teams that do that. During Hurricane Irma the Keys in Monroe County had one PIO. When our PIO deployment team came in we all got the passwords to Monroe County social media sites and remotely we all monitored and posted social media updates for them.