



ASG Utilizes Social Media to Train Emergency Response Teams

Social media and collaborative technologies have become critical components of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. From hurricanes to chemical releases and plant explosions, many emergency responders are turning to social media technologies to gain and share information and connect with citizens during all phases of a crisis. Over 1 billion people regularly use the social networking site Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family, stay informed of current events, and even to grow their business resources. Social media has become an integrated part of the daily lives of most Americans, as well as much of the rest of the world. Alliance Solutions Group, Inc. (ASG) recognizes the power of social networking and media and has developed a way to utilize it for a new purpose: disaster response training and exercises.

ASG conducts incident planning, CBRN response and emergency management training and exercises for multiple local, state, and Federal agencies. The purpose of this training is to prepare first responders and community leaders to prepare for and respond to a full spectrum of hazardous incidents (e.g., natural, manmade, and/or technological disasters, and terrorism). During training, participants are often provided with information on simulated incidents and then must choose the best course of action to follow in order to mitigate negative effects and gain operational control over the scenario. For most emergency responders, this is a typical method of training that they undergo frequently; keeping the material fresh can be difficult. To combat training fatigue, ASG continually seeks innovative ways to make the training more “real” and relevant.

A method ASG has developed to enhance training exercises involves using a “news feed” via the social media site Facebook. To reinforce this methodology, participants are prompted to utilize their Facebook accounts to track scenario “injects”: updates or interactions from other first responders, community leaders, and/or citizen observations. Major advantages to using this integrated methodology are that participants require little to no training to effectively use it, and they can gain insights from the news feed during the exercise via simulated live pictures and captions that relate directly to the exercise incident they are responding to.



Using the Facebook page to post exercise injects and information allows ASG to enhance the training experience in multiple ways. The information for the exercise can be controlled and posted at spaced intervals, which makes it seem that the updates are happening in real-time. It also requires the participants to maintain constant vigilance; they have to assimilate and respond to any new information from Facebook as it appears, even if they are not yet prepared. For those reasons, the nature of social networking is a logical fit with emergency response.

So far, the reception of ASG’s integration of social media into training and exercises has been immensely positive. Emergency responders involved with this methodology and application in training and exercises have expressed that it keeps them engaged and interested in the scenario. As projected, participants have also communicated that the Facebook posts “add far more realism to [their] perception of the scenarios and make the content feel more relevant.”