

Blogging

We are living in the information age. The rise of computers and the internet has provided the opportunity to now share information and knowledge like never before. Only the invention of the Gutenberg's printing press rivals the information availability explosion that we are currently living in.

The culture of professional emergency managers is to share information with other emergency managers and other professions. Emergency management crosses the entire spectrum of interests in communities. The private sector, public sector and non-profit sectors are all areas of interest to an emergency manager preparing a community for the next disaster.

With this in mind, it was only natural to begin blogging on the topic of emergency management and homeland security. It started innocently enough by establishing email lists for the various disciplines. When I'd come across information that would be of interest I'd share that with the appropriate spectrum of people and organizations that I had on my email list. There were some days when I was sending ten or more emails a day. Maintaining a viable email list in our mobile society was also a time consuming proposition. One of my staff who was administering our King County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) web site suggested establishing an "Eric's Corner" web link on our King County web site and then inviting people to sign-up to get weekly updates "pushed" out to them. Without knowing it I had "backed into" the world of blogging. Besides sharing facts and documents I was also providing a bit of commentary if I had an opinion on the information being shared.

Putting the mechanics of a blog in place was not that difficult, but establishing a list serve to push updates out proved more challenging. I found that King County did not have the capacity to do another list serve and I was stymied for a period of time. Then through casual conversations with staff from other organizations, one of them, the City of Seattle's IT Office offered to host the list serve that pushed the blog updates out—and for no charge, where in my own jurisdiction I would have had to pay for the service. This is a great example of the level of cooperation that is needed if regional enterprises are to thrive.

After leaving King County I was able to establish a new blog, "Disaster-Zone" that operates on my company's web site. The advantage to having a company sponsored web presence is that it enables me to tap into the technical expertise of web professionals, which I would not have if I were blogging on my own. It also has enabled the establishment of another list serve function that again pushes out information to people in "Weekly Updates." There are currently almost 1,000 people who receive weekly Disaster-Zone blog updates. Technology has also advanced so that people who want to be notified of updates as they occur can sign up for Really Simple Syndication" (RSS) which is a blogging tool available to people who desire the updated blog postings as they happen.

Information is power. Some people chose to hoard it in order to maintain control over what gets done or doesn't get done. The opposite of that thinking which I follow, is that if I share what I know with others, I empower them to become better informed and therefore more effective in how they prepare their organizations, communities and regions. Sharing information in effect gives immortality to the person who is willing to share what they know. And, what you know should not die with you. It would be such a waste of a precious resource, years, sometimes decades, of experience which means hundreds or thousands of mistakes that you learned from.

People when they have information are empowered to make better decisions that may in some cases impact tens of thousands of people during disasters. I have found that blogging is a form of "mentoring" that allows a person to coach others in a profession that is still finding its way. If I can blog, anyone can! Try it and share what you know with others. Reap the rewards of knowing that together we are a stronger profession, and one that is known for collaboration.