

Statement of Ranking Member Donald Payne, Jr. (D-NJ)

“Emergency MGMT 2.0: How @SocialMedia & New Tech are Transforming Preparedness, Response, & Recovery #Disasters #Part1 #Privatesector”

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications
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The Internet has changed the world – it has changed how the government serves its citizens, how businesses serve its customers, and how the public engages in political and social action.

During recent disasters - from Hurricane Sandy to the Boston Marathon bombings - the Internet was used to galvanize ordinary citizens. After the Boston Marathon Bombings, Boston-residents used Google Docs to let marathoners know that their homes were open to those unable to return to their hotels.

After Hurricane Sandy, survivors used Twitter and Facebook to post images of the devastation caused by the storm.

Survivors also used social media to reconnect with loved ones and share information about open gas stations, grocery stores, and pharmacies. Others used social media to coordinate volunteer response and aid efforts.

Clearly, social media and big data have revolutionized disaster preparedness and response activities.

The FEMA’s *2013 National Preparedness Report*, which was released last week, found that Emergency management agencies are increasingly using social media to disseminate information and are exploring additional applications of social media. The same report also found progress in the use of information management systems and ongoing data integration efforts to improve information sharing and situational awareness.

As Members of the Committee on Homeland Security and the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications, we sit in a unique position as Internet technology evolves and the world continues to change around us.

Our role requires us to help the Federal government, State and local first responders, and the private sector harness the potential that Internet technology can bring to bear in disaster preparedness and response activities, while working to mitigate the inherent limitations of the technology.

Despite the benefits social media can yield, we know that the technology can be used to spread misinformation. We know that social media and web data are vulnerable to hacking and misuse.

We know that unless data is integrated and organized properly and shared with the right people, it is useless. And we know that unless someone has Internet access, none of this information is going to reach them.

During disasters, it is critical the information be accurate, secure, and accessible.

I look forward to exploring these issues with our private-sector witnesses today. By launching Rumor Control, a website devoted to correcting misinformation circulated by social media sites, FEMA has begun to tackle some of these issues.

But I think that the witnesses here today have valuable insight to offer. I know the PSE&G was recently recognized for its innovative use of social media during Hurricane Sandy. And I know that PSE&G participates in the Business Emergency Operations Center Alliance in New Jersey, which facilitates public-private information sharing during disasters. Their good work should provide valuable information on best practices to improve the use of social media and big data during disasters.