Innovative communication strategies during extreme weather events

National Symposium on Extreme Weather Event Impacts on Transportation Infrastructure
Washington, DC
May 22, 2013
My background: WSDOT communications (2002-2010)

- Numerous natural and man-made disasters
- In 2005, deployed FEMA Hurricane Katrina Recovery.

Gov. Gregoire’s Communication’s Director during 2007 statewide natural disaster.
What we’ll cover

• What is social media
• Before an event
• During an event
• After an event

Goal: Grow and maintain credibility with public, business and elected officials.
Social media tools

What’s so social about today’s media?

• Facebook
• Twitter
• YouTube

It’s all about the conversation!
1 out of every 8 people on earth are on Facebook

9 out of 10 US internet users are on a social network

1 of 5 minutes spent online is on a social network

Social Networking: Share of Total Time Spent Online

- 2012: 20%
- 2011: 16%
- 2010: 12%
- 2009: 8%
- 2008: 4%
- 2007: 4%
Social media is ...

Changing the way people interact

• It gives a glimpse into an event
• It’s real time, immediate
• It provides information from the field
• It’s resilient when traditional media struggles
• It’s mobile
DOTs using social media

- AASHTO’s first social media survey of state DOTs published in 2010.
- 26 states were using Twitter – primarily relaying road/traffic information
- 14 states used Facebook.
- 7 states had a blog
- 10 states used podcasting
Social Media Tool Usage

Most used social media tools
Social media is not ..

- A silver bullet. It can’t do everything
- A stand-a-lone practice. It **MUST** be part of a complete communication effort that includes the basics:
  - Key message
  - Audience
  - Strategies and tactics
Before an event

• There is not always time before an event. But when there is …
  ▪ Direct people to resources to keep in touch
  ▪ Manage expectations (staffing, updates)
  ▪ Share concern, but try to avoid over hyping.

• Clearly understand audiences/needs:
  Freight, Media (& public), Governor/Legislative.
During an event

WSDOT’s Standard Toolbox

Goal is to ‘leverage’ the media.

- Established 24-hour EOC w/social media staffing
- Coordinated media relations across regions
- Updated press releases and media briefings to coincide with media cycles
- Constant web and 5-1-1 updates
- Listserv, Twitter, Facebook and email alerts sent directly to public and industry (freight)
During an event

Remember to feed the news outlets.

But also remember power of social media to go around them
During an event

Take people there. It’s too dangerous for them, but your crews are in the field.

What’s the story?
Take them to the scene
After an event

• Close the loop.
• Chronicle the aftermath. Your folks were there.
NY State DOT trucks ready for action
West Virginia maintenance crews clearing debris
Hurricane Sandy aftermath in Rhode Island
North Carolina highway post-Sandy
Sandy delivered blow to West Virginia, too
Innovative communication strategies during extreme weather events

Contact:
Lloyd D. Brown, Director of Communications
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

(202) 624-5802 office
(202) 677-5811 cell
lbrown@aashto.org