

Social Media Provide Accessibility to Emergency Managers

BY NEIL MCDEVITT

After Tina Robinette gets up in the morning, she first checks the news and then heads to her Twitter and Facebook account to talk about the articles she's just read.

That probably doesn't sound very different than a lot of us but Tina takes this very seriously. In fact, she considers it to be part of her job as Assistant Fire Marshal with the Office of the State Fire Marshal in South Carolina. "Social Media applications such as Twitter and Facebook allow me the opportunity to spread tips on fire prevention instantly to anyone with a cellphone or PC", she said.

After a fire devastated a family in her area, she posted this tweet: "*If u dont have smoke alarms in ur home call the local Fire Dept & ask if they give em 4 free. Keep urself & family alive*". While it uses many of the shortcuts required to get a long message out in the infamous 140 character limit of Twitter, this message instantly got out to over 2,200 followers and was repeated (called re-tweeted) by others who were able to send the same message to their followers.

To be sure, there still is a place for the more traditional blogs that the deaf community has seen in the past decade. Tina writes more about the fire mentioned above in her blog at <http://tinafightfire.wordpress.com/> but notes that the way people receive information has been transformed by



Social media.

"Social media is a new tool, particularly to the fire service," Tina wrote. "It reaches to those who wouldn't ordinarily read the local newspaper or watch the local news. Social

Media applications such as Twitter and Facebook are fun for younger audiences and are just now starting to spread to older adults."

Greg Friese, MS, NREMT-P and co-founder of PIOSocialMediaTraining.com, wrote that Twitter and other forms of social media have drastically impacted how emergency services providers have interacted with the public. During a recent spat between actual Emergency Medical Service providers and NBC-Universal regarding how EMS was depicted in the show *Trauma*, Greg noted that the Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS) had encouraged its members to use social media to try and affect change. In Greg's view, the AAMS's 222 followers were unlikely to make meaningful change. However, he said, "If a local fire department had 199 local followers that might be enough to garner support for local initiatives to improve service or prevent fires."

As it applies to deaf and hard of hearing people, we've seen an explosion in how Twitter is utilized by the deaf and hard of hearing community. Almost every major deaf and hard of hearing advocacy group has a Twitter



account or a Facebook account. In fact, the power of these social media networks enabled DeafHope, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending domestic violence and sexual assault against deaf and hard of hearing women, to win a \$25,000 award from Chase Community Giving.

TDI World asked Tina Robinette how Social Media programs like Twitter have impacted her ability to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing people. She replied, "Social Media has greatly broadened my knowledge of how people such as those who are deaf and hard of hearing think and respond in regards to fire prevention and emergencies in general."

And this captures the power of Twitter/Facebook perfectly. People are being exposed to new ideas and new individuals that they otherwise would never have had the opportunity to meet.

Greg Freise sums it up perfectly by saying, "People use the Internet to make their lives better. They do that through connecting, learning, sharing, and purchasing. We are surrounded by media messages that tell us what is wrong in the world and what individuals, organizations, and parties are doing to fix those problems."