



NEWS

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“GET READY, AMERICA!” SURVEY: RESIDENTS RELYING MORE ON SOCIAL MEDIA, TEXTING IN NATURAL DISASTERS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- “Get Ready, America!” -- [The National Hurricane Survival Initiative](http://www.nationalhurricanesurvival.org) - today released a revealing new survey showing that social media and text messaging are fast becoming the leading ways Americans will communicate or get information in a disaster.

The Sachs/Mason-Dixon Poll commissioned by the initiative found that 72% of Americans are members of a social network, such as [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com), [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com) or MySpace and 45% said they would rely on it to communicate with friends and loved ones in the event of a natural disaster; another 24% said they might.

"During natural disasters such as hurricanes, having access to wireless services including Mobile Broadband is just as critical to response and recovery as having access to essential items like food and safe drinking water," said Marshall Criser, President of AT&T in Florida. "Wireless services provide a lifeline in times of need, and the wireless phone industry is working hard to ensure our customers are able to use them when it counts."

Social media use is more prevalent among younger Americans, with 91% of those 18-34 years old active on a social media platform and 63% saying they will use those platforms to communicate in a disaster. Even among those ages 35-59, 75% say they are on a social media platform and 44% say they will use them to communicate in a disaster. Women are more likely to use these platforms than men, with 75% of women saying they use a platform compared to 68% of men, and 51% of women saying they will turn to these platforms to communicate in a disaster compared to 39% of men.

"Being prepared for any hazard is critical and can save lives," said Bryan Koon, Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management. "Surviving natural disasters, such as hurricanes, in 2011 means having a disaster supply kit that includes devices such as smartphones as well as knowing how and where to receive updates through social media."

Still, there is room to educate Americans about how to use new technology to protect themselves or seek help in a disaster. More than 50% of Americans said they would rely on a cell phone or home phone to communicate with family members in a disaster, although these tools often are not operational in the immediate aftermath of a storm. Only 8% said they would rely on text messaging, although this has proven to be one of the most reliable forms of communication in a disaster.

“It’s important that we educate people now – before a disaster strikes – about how to use technology and social media to get and to share information in a disaster,” said Michelle Ubben, National Coordinator of “Get Ready, America!” “The poll numbers clearly show that a strong majority of Americans would rely on social media if encouraged and properly trained in its best usage.”

Although social media is gaining acceptance among older demographic population segments, Ubben said the poll makes clear that one size won’t fit all and emergency managers need to employ a variety of strategies to reach all age groups.

Natural disasters have dominated news coverage in recent months, from the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan in March to the recent tornados in Alabama and flooding in Missouri and Tennessee. The 2010 hurricane season saw the formation of 11 named storms in 40 days, with two – Danielle and Earl – becoming major, back-to-back hurricanes.

"Knowing how and where to receive information can save lives during and after severe weather events," said Jeremy Heidt, Public Information Officer, Tennessee Emergency Management Agency. "State emergency managers are coming to grips with the importance of sharing information online and responding to questions and comments during natural disasters through new media channels."

Forecasters predict an above-average hurricane season in 2011, with 12 to 18 named storms, including 3 to 6 major hurricanes. But, no matter what the forecast, emergency managers say all citizens should be prepared for a disaster by having a family disaster plan and emergency kit, updating their insurance coverage, knowing when to evacuate and understanding how to communicate in a disaster.

"Social media has become an important tool for emergency disaster service agencies," said Jennifer Byrd, National Public Relations Director for The Salvation Army. "Nationally, The Salvation Army uses social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness of our disaster relief efforts in an impacted area, such as food, hydration and spiritual/emotional care."

Now in its 16th year, the “Get Ready, America!” – the National Hurricane Survival Initiative -- is the nation’s most comprehensive disaster preparedness public education initiative developed in partnership with the [National Emergency Management Association](#), [The Salvation Army](#) and the [International Hurricane Research Center at Florida International University](#), with technical assistance from the [National Hurricane Center](#) and [FEMA](#).

For more information about how to use technology and social media in a disaster, along with other tips to about how to protect your home and family, visit www.hurricanesafety.org and tune in to the annual broadcast, “[Get Ready, America!](#)” carried on more than 55 network affiliate television stations from Texas to Maine.