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### Can Social Media be Helpful in Disasters?

The Congressional Research Service report, "*Social Media and Disasters: Current Uses, Future Options, and Policy Considerations*", discusses how social media can be used to disseminate information to the public during an emergency.

Social media's use as a source of information has been well established and continues to grow. From politicians to pop singers, websites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn are all being used to provide the public with a constant source of information on nearly every subject. International, state, and local organizations have begun to take the sharing process to the next step, allowing individuals to connect directly to a source to collect information. An example of this is FEMA's Twitter account. After setting up their own account on Twitter, anyone can connect to FEMA's Twitter account and receive constant updates on natural disasters, emergency planning tips, and federal aid applications and deadlines.

The second use of social media that the report discusses – using social media to collect emergency information – is much newer and is still in the development stage for many social media users. This concept requires the monitoring and processing of potentially large amounts of user data and information. An example of this would be emergency teams after a major flooding event monitoring local Twitter posts in order to locate stranded people through their personal tweets, such as: "Stuck on roof in #Hickory – house & road completely underwater", which could then be used to communicate directly with the trapped individual(s) and to help facilitate a rescue when phone lines may be down or jammed.

One of the drawbacks to this type of social media use and monitoring is that it is very unreliable and may fall prey to misleading or intentionally false posting and reporting by individuals. Another concern is the amount of time and man-power that it would take to develop, institute, and monitor a social media post tracking system.

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