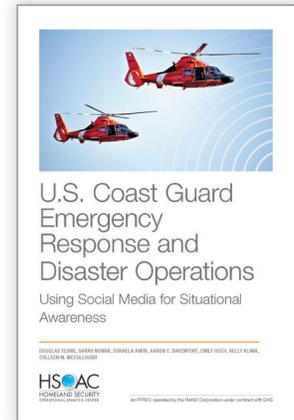


U.S. Coast Guard Emergency Response and Disaster Operations: Using Social Media for Situational Awareness



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www.rand.org/t/RR4296

Social media can enhance situational awareness in response operations, but using social media this way poses challenges. Researchers sought to contribute to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) mission to ensure resilience to disasters by helping DHS understand whether and how social media might be better leveraged for such situational awareness. The primary focus of this research was on U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) response operations.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can social media be better leveraged for situational awareness in USCG response operations?

KEY FINDINGS

Ways in which the USCG receives distress calls are evolving

- For decades, the USCG and other boaters have relied on communication channels (e.g., Rescue 21) that are intended specifically for maritime safety. As a result, these channels provide specific information that can be used to locate mariners in distress.
- However, a significant proportion of distress calls now come to the USCG through other means, such as cell phones and, indirectly, from 911 calls. This raises concerns about potential hindrances to the USCG's SAR mission, including lack of location information, uncertainty about overwater cell coverage, and lack of organizational capacity to collect and analyze social media information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- DHS should develop policies and procedures to facilitate sharing cell phone distress location data with the USCG.
- The USCG should work to ensure that an organization—itsself or another—assumes responsibility for understanding cell coverage over water.
- The USCG should identify other missions for which social media information could help increase maritime safety and security and enhance environmental protection and response operations.