

DISASTER MANAGEMENT CONFERENCES ON THE INTERNET

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ABSTRACT

The Internet now offers a new approach for improving the sharing of information on disaster management concerns and research among emergency management practitioners. Three examples will be discussed in this paper.

The University of Bradford in England organized an international disaster management virtual conference on the Internet from June 1 through August 31, 1996, instead of hosting another traditional disaster conference at the University which it had done each year between 1989 and 1993.

The United Nations Secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and the Regional IDNDR Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in San Jose, Costa Rica, organized an internet conference August 16 to October 16, 1996, as part of the IDNDR "Cities at Risk" public awareness campaign.

FEMA has a Preparedness, Training and Exercise Directorate. The Preparedness Branch of the Training Division has a Family Preparedness Program. This program's "Partnership in Action" project held a discussion conference on the Internet on June 20, 1996, and plans to have another Internet conference in November 1996.

UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD, UK

The University of Bradford's Disaster Prevention and Limitation Unit held a traditional international conference on disasters every year between 1989 and 1993 in England. The costs of airplane travel, hotels, meals, and conference registration, however, were obstacles which made it difficult or impossible for many interested would-be participants to get travel funds or the allocation of time to actually go to England for the conference. Professor Alf Keller, Director of the Disaster Prevention and Limitation Unit, therefore, decided to organize a conference on the Internet. The Virtual Conference Center of MCB University Press conducted this First Internet Conference on Electronic Communication and Disaster Management from 1st June through Au-

gust 1, 1996, at its WWW web site <http://www.mcb.co.uk/confhome.htm>

The Organising Committee for this virtual conference included:

Chairman: Dr. A.Z. Keller, University of Bradford

Mr. Eric Alley, OBE, President, Institute of Civil Defence and Disaster Studies

Dr. Eric Dykes, Civil Emergencies Centre, University of Hertfordshire

Professor Hayim Granot, Bar-I-Lan University, Israel

Professor E.L. Quarentelli, Disaster Research Centre, University of Delaware, USA

Dr. S.W.A.Gunn, President, World Association of Disaster and Emergency Medicine

Professor Denis Smith, Centre for Risk and Crisis Management, University of Durham

Mr. Keith Cassidy, Head, Major Hazards Assessment Unit, Health and Safety Executive, UK Secretary, Ms. E.L. Coles, Centre for Risk and Crisis Management, University of Durham.

It was intended that this conference would be the first in a series of annual conferences and would prove a natural evolution from the five traditional conferences (1989-1993) initiated by the Disaster Prevention and Limitation Unit at the University of Bradford, UK.

Papers presented during the conference included:

"Problematical Aspects of the Information/Communication Revolution for Disaster Planning and Disaster Research: Ten Non-Technical Issues and Questions." Professor E L Quarantelli, Disaster Research Centre, University of Delaware, USA

"Emergency Communications: A Step Toward Standardization." Ghislain Demers, University of British Columbia, Canada

"Using the WWW as a Medium to Teach Disaster Management: Notes on a Course in Progress." Dirk H R Spennemann, Charles Sturt University, New South

Wales, Australia

"The Role of Amateur Radio in Providing Emergency Electronic Communication for Disaster Management." Russell C Coile, Ph.D, FICD, Disaster Coordinator, Pacific Grove Fire Department, California, USA

"On a Wing and A prayer? Exploring the Human Components of Technical Failure." Professor Denis Smith, Durham University Business School, UK

"Tasmanian Lifelines Project." John Lunn, Tasmanian State Emergency Service, Australia

"Emergency Inter-Organisational Relationships." Professor Hayim Granot, Bar-Ilan University Israel

"No Introduction Necessary." Neil Hayes, Emergency Planning Unit, Manchester FCDA, UK

"A Global Emergency Management Information Network Initiative: GEMINI." Albert J Simard, Canadian Forest Service Forest Fire Coordinator

"The Canadian Wildfire Fire Information System." Albert J Simard, Canadian Forest Service Forest Fire Coordinator

"Disaster Schemata and the School Curriculum." Dr John Lidstone, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

The papers were posted on the Internet. All registered participants were invited to send in questions or comments on the papers. The authors then answered the questions and provided further discussion of the issues raised.

International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

The United Nations Secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and the Regional IDNDR Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in San Jose, Costa Rica, organized an Internet conference August 26- October 16, 1996. The theme of the conference was "Cities at Risk." The call for participation said,

"Are the cities of today and tomorrow waiting for catastrophes to happen? Every day, there are news reports concerning cities stricken by disasters. These events are likely to continue, and become worse, unless we change our policies and actions regarding environment and development.

-What is the conference? The 1996 IDNDR Conference, "Solutions for Cities at Risk," is a forum to exchange ideas and practical solutions on how city authorities and concerned citizens can protect their cities from natural disasters.

-Who will be involved? City administrators, national

government authorities, NGOs, UN agencies, universities, scientific organizations, businesses ... people from all world regions with an interest in issues related to the environment, development and disasters.

- Why participate? * Learn what communities around the world are doing to protect themselves from disasters. * Pose questions to those directly involved in city programs to see how their activities could be adapted to your own work.

* Present your urban disaster mitigation experiences for discussion and feedback.

* Consult experts in many different professions about disaster mitigation issues.

- Conference goals: The emphasis of this conference will be on the exchange of practical solutions that city authorities and concerned citizens can adapt to their own local needs. The conference aims to: * Encourage urban authorities and community leaders to protect cities from disasters. * Gather "success stories" of urban disaster mitigation that can be adapted in various cities around the world. * Identify policies and "lessons learned" that may be adapted to local circumstances. * Facilitate networking, partnerships, and exchanges between all organizations interested in making cities safer from disasters.

The Internet conference is taking place August 26, 1996, to October 25, 1996. The World Wide Web Home Page is: <http://www.quipu.net/risk/>

The organizers used electronic mail to send the papers and to receive questions and comments. Messages were sent to: risk@thecity.sfsu.edu.

English was the working language, but guidelines were available in French and Spanish. Participants registered by sending an e-mail message to: listserv@thecity.sfsu.edu with the message: subscribe risk [your-first-name your-last-name] (Example: subscribe risk James Witt) (substituting your own first and last name for "James Witt")

This initiative, organized by the United Nations Secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), is part of the 1996 IDNDR "Cities at Risk" public awareness campaign. Anyone wishing to receive campaign materials to help carry out local activities or receive additional information about the Internet conference should contact:

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The IDNDR WWW Home Page is:

<http://hoshi.cic.sfu.ca/hazard/idndr.html>

FEMA'S FAMILY PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM

The third example of Internet conferences is a FEMA project organized by FEMA Preparedness, Training and Exercise Directorate. The Training Division's Preparedness Branch has a Family Preparedness Program. The goal of this program is to have the American public better prepared about what to do before, during and after a disaster. The Family Preparedness program intends to help emergency managers develop partnerships with businesses, schools, industry and community organization, and to disseminate disaster preparedness information, including using the Internet.

FEMA has begun to develop its own national partners. This initial group includes the American Red Cross, National Weather Service, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., AFL-CIO Community Services, National Sheriffs' Association, Camp Fire Boys and Girls, and the National Association for Search and Rescue.

The Family Preparedness program's "Partnership in Action" project held its first conference on the Internet on June 20, 1996. The World Wide Web Home Page was: <http://www.partner.org/actnow>

The conference was opened by Kay Goss, FEMA Associate Director for Preparedness, Training and Exercises with greetings from President Clinton and Director James Lee Witt. The facilitator was Ralph Swisher, Family Preparedness program manager. FEMA had gathered a panel of experts to answer questions submitted over the Internet. The experts were: Rocky Lopes of the American Red Cross Community Education Department; Bob Johnson, Chairman of the National Coordinating Council on Emergency Management Fam-

ily Preparedness Task Force; Janet Clements of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management; Barbara Patasce, Public Fire Education Specialist for the United States Fire Administration; and Pat Moore, a Certified Disaster Recovery Professional, Fellow of the Business Continuity Institute. FEMA invited anyone interested to register for the conference and submit questions for the experts during the initial two hour period.

The registration process is intended to build up a national resource bank of people interested in emergency management. The information inserted by the participants indicates their individual skills, accomplishments and interests. The resource bank makes it possible for individuals to contact others of like interests.

FEMA plans to have its second Family Preparedness Internet conference in November 1996.

CONCLUSION

These examples illustrate only some of the types of use of the Internet for emergency management. It is to be hoped that technological advances will continue to evolve to help us with the dissemination of disaster preparedness information.

Information on disaster research and these Internet applications is available from the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center of the University of Colorado, Boulder. The Center publishes an electronic newsletter DISASTER RESEARCH. To subscribe or unsubscribe send a message to: listproc@lists.colorado.edu To subscribe, send this one-line command in the body of your message: SUBSCRIBE HAZARDS Your Name

A printed bimonthly newsletter, the "Natural Hazards Observer" is also available and is free. Subscription requests for the Observer should be sent to:

Natural Hazards Research and Applications
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