

We Must Stop using Social Media for Community Alerts!

The recent Facebook conference by Mendocino Sheriff Kendall regarding the Khadijah Britton case in Covelo reminded me of how much our public agencies rely on social media to relay information, regardless that not everybody uses such. And with the approach of fire season I felt we needed to be aware of the consequences.

I am concerned that our public agencies continue using privately-owned social media to publish what should rightfully be placed on the taxpayer-funded public websites. This includes not only announcements like this one, but also emergency updates (fires, weather, etc.), health (covid, vaccinations, etc.) and general government updates. Taxpayer monies fund our public agency's websites and call lines and critical information should be published there first, then elsewhere as is deemed necessary, not the other way around. I expect government to work for all of us, not just those that are members of some corporate social experiment. And we certainly don't need to hear and see the comments of trolls and malcontents during public safety announcements do we?

Facebook recently had a disagreement with the Australian government over carrying news items. As a result of the disagreement, Facebook shutoff news stories across Australia for a period of time. Caught up in the shutdown were the bush fire reporting, leaving folks there scrambling for alternative sources of this critical information. Can you imagine that happening here during one of our fires?

Let's not wait for something like that to happen. We must employ taxpayer-funded CalFire and Sheriff sites for the primary citations of facts (e.g. fire at such and such location, moving in X direction). Social media can follow as desired, typically by social media users sharing what they hear or see.

For those of you on social media, are you aware that everything you say, or your 'friends' say about you, is permanent? That an employer, landlord, loan officer or any government agency can find this to use in judgment? Or that every interest you express (and location you visit) is collected and sold to companies from which targeted advertising follows you? Not to mention that algorithms feed like-minded posts to you that do not necessarily represent the reality in the real world. Push your representatives to publish information in a trusted location and manner.

And for the county government agencies, please consider reconfiguring your taxpayer-funded websites for ease of posting critical and timely information the public needs to be advised of (and please, don't let the trolls have a place for comments). Trust is built through reliability and dependability -- we just can't afford to have loss of life result from inaccessible critical alerts.

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