

Dumfries and Galloway VOST (Scotland)

Social media has become an increasingly important tool for responding organisations to share information with the public. During an emergency, it can be crucial that people in affected areas are able to obtain accurate and timely information. By the same token, responders benefit from being able to gather intelligence from the public, validate, deploy resources as required and disseminate any useful intelligence gathered.

Police Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council developed 'Dumfries and Galloway Virtual Operations Support Team'(DGVOST), the first of its kind in the UK.

During deployments staff members from the two lead agencies, Police Scotland and Local Authority, supported by the National Health Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue, HM Coastguard and volunteer agencies (Mountain Rescue, Inshore rescue) all jointly issue consistent and reliable information under the 'DGVOST' branding and benefit from the involvement and engagement of the public.

The greatest enhancement the DGVOST has brought has been an increase in situational awareness for both the general public and incident managers. The live time feeds sent into the team from both the Public and responders on the ground allow incident managers to make informed decisions about resource deployment and priorities. Recent activations have demonstrated the significant value to be had from crowdsourcing situational awareness and the VOSTs far-ranging reach in terms of warning & informing.

Additionally, emergency interventions have been successfully deployed as a result of communications received via the VOST including the rescue of a disabled grandfather and a 6 month old child from a car stranded in deep snow who were rescued and taken to safety in less than an hour from the initial communication from the child's parent. This demonstrates the potential for seamless integration of the intelligence gathering process and responder activities going forward.

In addition to providing some background context as above, the Presentation would cover five recent activations;

- Storm Desmond (Dec 2015)
- Storm Frank (Dec 2015)
- Ex Hurricane Ophelia (Oct 2017)
- Snow Event (Jan 2018)
- #beastfromtheeast (Feb / March 2018)

And will discuss the following;

- Integration with wider response structures and systems
- successes,
- challenges,
- learning,
- unexpected benefits and;
- will end by discussing our hopes for the future of the system

Primary authors: Mr POTTS, Adam; Mr THOMSON, Mark

Presenters: Mr POTTS, Adam; Mr THOMSON, Mark

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