

POWER TO THE PEOPLE:

IMPLICATIONS OF VOLUNTEERED GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (VGI) FOR OFFICIAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (OEM)



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VGI refers to the creation and sharing of geographic information by community members, mainly through social media, smartphones and online mapping tools. VGI represents a shift in the ways information is created, shared, used and experienced. Detailed interviews with 13 emergency management professionals from 8 organisations across 5 Australian states provided insights into the impacts of VGI on OEM.

1. What are the opportunities of VGI?

- Fast, broad, 2-way communication
- Collection of diverse local knowledge



- Different ways to present information
- Increased community connectedness
- Increased risk awareness
- Community engagement in all stages of PPRR



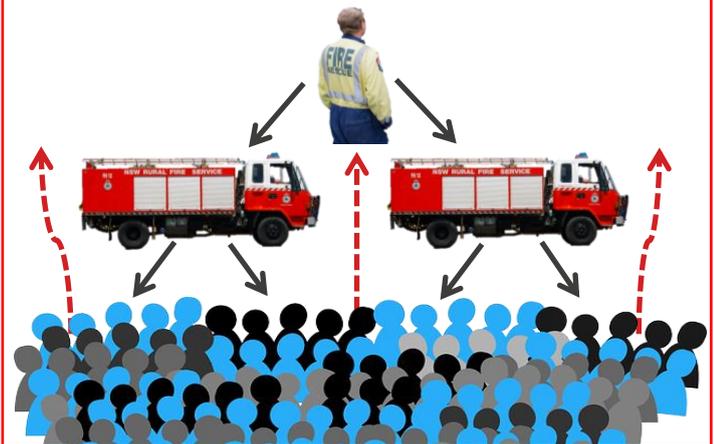
2. Is OEM effectively realising these opportunities?

- Broadly, no
- VGI mostly used as 1-way broadcast medium
- Practices of citizens contributing and sharing information are not widely encouraged or fostered



4. How does VGI impact OEM?

- VGI disrupts top-down power structure
- A culture shift away from centralized control
- Citizens have more control over information



3. What challenges limit the use of VGI in OEM?

- Digital divide
- Data quality and misinformation
- Legal concerns (liability)
- Data management
- Aligning spontaneous, unstructured data with structured OEM systems



5. Ways forward

- To capitalise on the opportunities of VGI, agencies need to share responsibility and control
- Agencies should be flexible in supporting VGI practices, allowing people to collectively manage disasters
- Community information should be valued as expert alongside official information
- More defined responsibilities and improved legal protections will help agencies more effectively embrace VGI

End User statement: "The Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program is collaborating with the University of Sydney to support the development of an evidence base to inform our future work. The partnership allows Tasmania Fire Service to test the waters and be able to put the necessary steps in place to make an informed decision about our future involvement in this space."

Peter Middleton, Tasmania Fire Service Community Development Coordinator

