

How is First Responder Communities of Practice being used?

First Responder Communities of Practice is a network of vetted, active and retired first responders, emergency response professionals and Federal, State, local, or Tribal Homeland Security officials sponsored by the U. S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science & Technology (S&T) Directorate's First Responders Group. Registered members of this professional network share information, ideas, lessons learned and best practices, enabling them to more efficiently and effectively prepare for all hazards. Members use tools such as wikis, blogs and RSS feeds to collaborate online on the creation and management of critical planning, training, and other initiatives. Through information sharing and active participation in community workspaces, members are able to leverage each other's experiences to meet mission objectives. First Responder Communities of Practice not only offers information repositories and content creation tools, but also provides networking capabilities for practitioners across the country to connect with one another in a trusted, online environment.

Has the intended audience been reached?

Yes, the site has more than 5,000 members from all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Members post documents and blog entries, share documents, edit wiki pages, message each other and collaborate on projects across more than 150 Communities. On average, the site has more than 17,000 page views per month.

Analysis by DHS of the practical utility of the collection.

FRCoP is a prime collaboration tool for all the various stakeholders with whom DHS engages, including first responders (all disciplines including volunteers), government (state, local, federal and contractors), and academia (DHS Centers of Excellence and others). The site currently hosts 84 communities ranging from communities of interest to specific project groups such as Virtual USA (vUSA). vUSA participants are using FRCoP for day-to-day project management and for sharing information about the project with the rest of the FRCoP community. The site also hosts the activities of DHS S&T's Virtual Social Media Working Group (VSMWG), a body of first responders who work to publish best practices, tips and plans for the use of social media in emergency management. The site also offers a virtual home base for the National Urban Security Technology Lab's (NUSTL) New York Area Science & Technology (NYAST) where members can ask questions and view presentations from past group meetings and sessions.

Analysis by DHS of other similar platforms currently in use by first responders.

A number of other similar platforms were reviewed prior to the development of First Responder Communities of Practice. The analysis is as follows:

Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN): Designed for collaboration but within specific silos. In addition, HSIN only permits government employees and government contractors as members. The siloed nature of HSIN does not encourage collaboration with non-government employees, such as volunteer First Responders who make up the bulk of the First Responder Community. Unlike Communities of Practice, HSIN members can't connect across communities

nor do they have ready access and insight into the activities of other communities. First Responder Communities of Practice really focuses on the open sharing and collaboration of information to allow members to network and make connections where otherwise they would likely be unaware of one another.

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS): National online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency management and homeland security communities. LLIS.gov offers a document library for posting items including after action documents from tabletop and other exercises.

Responder Knowledgebase (RKB): RKB's primary mission is focused around providing emergency responders with information on the approved equipment list (AEL).