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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



USGS Volcanoes – Successes and challenges in social media

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Social media has become the de facto way for people to get the personalized news and information they want to receive – it is the ultimate opt in. In January 2016, the Global Web Index estimated that there are 2.3 billion active social media users worldwide. In May 2016, the Pew Research Center indicated that 62% of U.S. adults use social media as their primary source for news. These channels are not only a dominant means to access the latest news, people now expect important and time-sensitive information to be available on social media. To further improve the relevancy, transparency and dissemination of USGS information, the USGS Volcano Hazards Program now operates social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. We use these networks to share timely, accurate, and authoritative information on volcanic activity and research to a wide and eager audience. There are challenges, however, in using fast-paced, on-demand tools to communicate with the public, especially when non-authoritative sources undermine the message with inaccurate and outdated information. By regularly engaging with our followers and responding to queries, we build stronger relationships and our users trust the truthfulness of the information we share. Successful social media strategies include narrating major volcanic events and lessons learned, posting videos and photos that both educate and provide users with a window into our to researchers and current activities, and automatic sharing our volcano activity notifications. This strong presence of posting current and relevant science using our USGS Volcanoes social media accounts solidifies public perception that USGS is the authoritative voice in the U.S. regarding volcanic activity. This lays the groundwork for us to effectively communicate information during all future U.S. volcanic crises.