

EMERGENCY SERVICE



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LOCATION INTELLIGENCE AND SPATIAL ANALYTICS CAN HELP US TO DEAL WITH THE INCREASING NUMBER OF NATURAL DISASTERS. BUT WE SHOULDN'T BE TOO QUICK TO ASSUME GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGIES ARE A PANACEA



Are natural disasters 'the new normal'? Global climate change is certainly adding to the number of and intensity of incidents around the world, whether it's through rising sea levels, more violent winds or greater rainfall. Scientists are also clear we're passed the point where global warming is reversible – it's now just a question of how much hotter the world is going to get.

That suggests we're going to have to learn to live with an annual increase in catastrophes. So, how do we prepare for and deal with this new normal? Greater investment in emergency response services is clearly going to be part of it, but smarter investment is needed just as much. Here, location intelligence and spatial analytics can play a part. As Ryan Lanclos reports on page 52, providing timely information to the right people in the right formats using geospatial technologies is already saving lives and saving money. Knowing which areas are prone to flooding, for example, can help with both evacuation before an event and prioritising emergency responses afterwards. Giving those on the ground data collection equipment can also help to coordinate operations, while smart sensors can enable

decision-makers to learn in real-time what the true situation is.

But is there such a thing as too smart? In the past few years, I've frequently discussed the adoption of UAVs in reference to Gartner's 'hype cycle', as the technology has gone from something new and potentially transformative to the stuff of everyday surveying. Arguably we're on the 'plateau of productivity' already in some areas at least, as the UAV's 'place in the market and its applications are well-understood'.

Thankfully, we're not yet at the point where natural disasters are the new normal, so there haven't yet been enough tests to fully determine UAVs' true place in emergency responses. But maybe we shouldn't be too keen to use them, simply because they're cheap, easy to use and versatile. Sure, you can send up a UAV to take photos and videos of sites. But what if it gets in the flight path of a rescue helicopter, for example? On page 45, MapAction veteran Alan Mills reports on his experiences in the field with UAVs, and it would seem that while they do have a plethora uses, they aren't themselves 'the new normal' for all rescue operations.

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Design:

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GeoConnexion International

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