

Twitter, texting could help families in disasters

By NATASHA T. METZLER (AP) – Tuesday, September 01, 2009

WASHINGTON — Text messaging, Twitter and social networking Web sites could help families stay in touch in the wake of a disaster, a national safety group said Tuesday.

The Safe America Foundation announced a campaign to train families about alternate ways of staying in touch if traditional communication methods are not working. The Atlanta-based group is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency on this "Drill Down for Safety" program to make people more aware of communication options during an emergency.

"In an emergency traditional phone lines may be down and traditional methods of communication may not be working," said spokeswoman Carla Shaw. "We want people to rehearse what would you do, and what other forms of communication would you have at your disposal."

She said drill participants should pre-load emergency messages onto their cell phones and pre-load useful communication Web sites, making these tools accessible in an emergency. Families should also discuss how they plan to use these tools and let each other know what types of signals to look for during a disaster, she added.

The organization's Web site offers a tutorial in emergency text messaging and may offer more tools in the future, according to Shaw.

More than 200,000 people are expected to participate in drills of alternative emergency communication tools starting on Sept. 11 and lasting through mid-October.

Some participants are individuals who pledged to practice disaster communication on Safe America's Web site. Others are employees of companies such as UPS, Motorola and Office Depot that plan to hold safety drills and training sessions.

Copyright © 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.