

Standard Hashtags for Disaster Response

I. Background

The Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office (PCDSPO) and the Office of the Presidential Spokesperson (PCDSPO-OPS) have used and have promoted the use of unified hashtags to monitor, track, and consolidate information before, during, and after a natural disaster strikes. This report is an overview of this. It concludes with an assessment of the effectiveness of using unified hashtags.

The Official Gazette and PCDSPO Twitter accounts are used to coordinate information dissemination, relief, and rescue efforts with netizens, the private media, and concerned agencies of the government (who also operate on Twitter). Personal Twitter accounts of Presidential Spokesperson Edwin Lacierda, Undersecretary Manolo Quezon, and Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Abigail Valte also actively promoted the responsible use of the hashtags.

The following are the official Twitter accounts of the Official Gazette and PCDSPO, as well as the officials of the OPS and the PCDSPO who are considered public figures, and who have Twitter handles with large followings:

- Official Gazette - @govph
- PCDSPO - @pcdsp
- Sec. Edwin Lacierda - @dawende
- Usec. Manuel L. Quezon III - @mlq3
- Usec. Abigail Valte - @abi_valte

II. Origin

We recognized that Twitter is a useful platform for disseminating government advisories, esp. to private media organizations, which can disseminate a message across media, social strata, and geographic location with speed and efficiency. Twitter is also useful for collecting information from the ground, especially at times of disaster in places where a relatively large portion of the population is online (i.e., the capital).

The hashtags #rescuePH and #reliefPH were first used in August 2012, when the country was experiencing storm-enhanced monsoon rains. These were initiatives from the private sector. Enough people were using the hashtags to make them trend for days. Eventually, we adopted the hashtags in our tweets for disseminating government advisories, and for collecting reports from the ground. We also ventured into creating new hashtags, and into convincing media outlets to use unified hashtags.

III. Promotion of Hashtags

Through Twitter, our office consulted news organizations and media personnel to support the use of hashtags that were already widely used by the public, such as #reliefPH and #rescuePH. We did the same thing for #walangpasok (English translation: no classes/work), storm-specific hashtags such as #YolandaPH, and #floodPH.

After we agreed on the hashtags, the OPS issued an official statement to the media and the public to carry these hashtags when tweeting about weather-related reports.

IV. Collating Data through Hashtags

Our office monitored the above-mentioned hashtags, and made databases and lists which would be used in aid of deployed government frontline personnel, or published as public information.

For example, announcements from schools, local government units, and government offices sent out with #walangpasok are collated and published as separate pages in the Official Gazette website.

We created databases from reports from #rescuePH, containing the details of those in need of rescue, which we endorsed to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC).

Needless to say, we assumed that the databases we created using these hashtags would be contaminated by invalid reports, such as spam and other inappropriate messages. We try to filter out these erroneous or malicious reports, before we make our official endorsements to the concerned agencies.

In coordination with officers from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), we also monitored the hashtag #reliefPH in order to identify disaster survivors who need food and non-food supplies.

VI. Commonly Used Hashtags

#RescuePH

Used when someone is in need of rescuing or has knowledge of someone in need of rescuing. When using #RescuePH, a user is encouraged to tweet a name, complete address, and contact information.

During the 2012 monsoon rains (Habagat 2012), which also flooded the capital, PCDSPO-OPS officials fielded requests for rescue using the hashtag #RescuePH. At the time, Undersecretary Manuel L. Quezon III coordinated with Google's Aileen Apolo and the private-sector individuals behind #rescuePH and #reliefPH in order to come up with a consolidated effort online. This became the model for Google Crisis Response - Person Finder that they debuted during the aftermath.

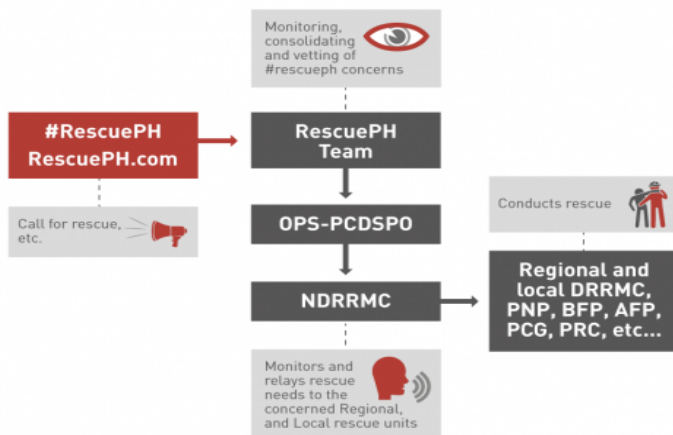
During Typhoon Pablo (Bopha) later the same year, the OPS and PCDSPO encouraged netizens to use #rescuePH, and to tag @dswdserves for efficient coordination online.

During Typhoon Yolanda, the unified hashtag #rescuePH was used to convey lists of people needing help. These were sent to the NDRRMC so names can be included in their lists of people/communities to attend to. At the time, the PCDSPO created an infographic explaining how to use the hashtag #RescuePH.

PCDSPO Report on Standard Hashtags for Disaster Response

On the ground, the first line of responders are the local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Councils (DRRMCs); national support/coordination is conducted online via @NDRRMC_Opcen. The @pcdsp0 helps arbitrate information between @NDRRMC_Opcen, @dswdserves, and <http://rescueph.com/>.

Process of #RESCUEPH



IMPORTANT HOTLINES

National Disaster and Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC)

Regional contact numbers:
[02] 911-1406, [02] 912-2465,
[02] 912-5668, [02] 911-1873

REGION	TEL NO.
I	+63.72.6076528
II	+63.78.8441630
III	+63.45.4551145
IV-A	+63.49.5317266
IV-B	+63.43.7234248
V	+63.52.4811656 / +63.52.4815031
VI	+63.33.3376671 / +63.33.5097971
VII	+63.32.4165025
VIII	+63.53.3238453
IX	+63.62.9916361
X	+63.88.8573988
XI	+63.82.2332022 / +63.82.2330611
XII	+63.83.5532994
CAR	+63.74.3042256 / +63.74.6190986
Caraga	+63.85.3428753
NCR	+63.2.4211918

Philippine National Police (PNP)

Hotline Patrol: 117
or send TXT PNP to 2920

REGION	TEL NO.	CELL NO.
I	700-0491	09189410326
II	[078] 304-1596 local 3100	09275161982
III	[045] 961-2980, 860-2943	09209142370
IV-A	531-447 Loc 6040	0917-807-6558/ 0915-944-6888
IV-B	[043] 288-1730	09272695661
V	820-46-02, 820-10-91	09175985848
VI	[033]335-0970/	0917-6301981
VII	[032] 256-2032/ 254-9146, Loc - 3907	0917-305-7370/ 0917-511-1879
VIII	[053]323-3036	0917-571-1779
IX	062-926-1977	0917-973-7551
X	851-2006	
XI	[082] 235-2515	
XII	083-302-2011	0917-621-1921
Caraga	[085] 342-1367	
ARMM	[064] 425 - 00 - 78	09177221981
COR	[074] 422-1977	09175853732

Bureau of Fire Protection (NCR)

117, [02] 729-5166, [02] 410-6319 [Regional Director, Information Desk]

PCDSPO|GOV.PH

Above image: Process of #rescueph as posted on <http://www.gov.ph/crisis-response/rescueph/>

#ReliefPH

The hashtag was encouraged for social media users who were calling for, or in need of relief goods. If they knew someone who required aid and relief services, they were encouraged to tweet the person's contact details using the #ReliefPH hashtag. @DSWDserves monitored the feed.

#ReliefPH was useful in solving surplus and deficits of goods between relief operations centers. We encouraged social media users to coordinate their #ReliefPH efforts with the DSWD's on-the-ground relief-coordination efforts.

During Habagat 2012, Undersecretary Manuel L. Quezon III coordinated with Google's Aileen Apolo and the ones behind #rescuePH and #reliefPH in order to come up with a consolidated effort online.

During Typhoon Pablo and Typhoon Yolanda, the OPS and the PCDSPO again engaged netizens to use #rescuePH and #reliefPH, and to tag @dswdserves for efficient coordination online.

Announcements and production efforts of the OPS and the PCDSPO were noticed and positively noted by the mainstream media—both foreign and local and multinational corporation Google.

#SafeNow

During Habagat 2012, OPS and PCDSPO officials retweeted various updates on the rescue and relief operations using the hashtag #SafeNow.

The hashtag #SafeNow is used when the user has been rescued or knows someone who has been rescued. This helps those working on rescue to check the list of pending affected persons or families, and update it.



Other Hashtags

#walangpasok

The hashtag #walangpasok used to be one of many different hashtags used by the media to collate announcements for suspension of classes or work during storms. In 2012, again through consultations via Twitter, our office asked the media to consolidate advisories under a unified hashtag in order to make it easier for the public, as well as schools and institutions, to collect and disseminate announcements.

Sample tweet from @govph: *For today, August 20, 2013, here is the list of #walangpasok.* <http://www.gov.ph/2013/08/19/list-of-school-suspensions-on-august-20-2013/>

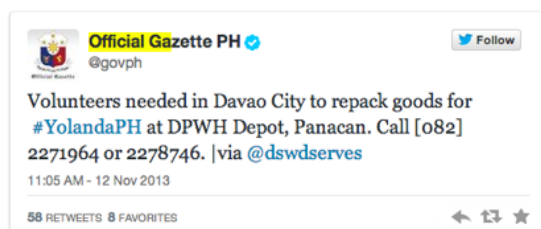
#FloodPH

The hashtag #FloodPH was encouraged for social media users to report flooded areas. This was conceptualized by our office. It was first used during Typhoon Pablo in December 2012.

Storm-specific hashtags

As with #walangpasok, the PCDSPO consulted with the media through Twitter, and proposed the use of a single hashtag for everyone concerned. Prior to this, media outlets created different hashtags, which set them apart from their perceived competitors. The convention is the local name of the storm + PH (e.g., #PabloPH, #YolandaPH). In the case of the heavy monsoon, the local name of the monsoon was used, plus the year (i.e., #Habagat2013).

Nov. 11, 11:25 p.m.: Are you in Davao City? Your help is needed packing relief supplies via @govph



And if you're looking to contribute to ongoing relief efforts, check out this NGO that is setting up a drive to send stuffed toys to traumatized kids post-Yolanda. Learn more @1000Bearhugs on Twitter

Nov. 11, 11:00 p.m.: As relief agencies work to assess how much physical damage has been caused by Haiyan, financial analysts have also begun crunching numbers to gauge the economic destruction left in the supertyphoon's wake.

Image above: This Twitter hashtag was used for highlighting relief and rescue efforts or updates from the government, related to Typhoon Yolanda.

V. Observations on Unified Hashtags

Positive

- **Tracking of Feeds** - It was relatively easier to monitor information on Twitter using hashtags, due to the nature of the platform; the character count limits cumbersome posts.
- **Very useful for citizens in the capital** - These hashtags were successful at the user level in Metro Manila, where internet use penetration is high. For disasters in the regions, where internet penetration is lower, Twitter was nevertheless useful for inter-sector (media - government - NGOs) coordination and information dissemination.

Negative

- **No information on successful rescue** - It has always been difficult to list the people who have been successfully rescued. The NDRRMC could only keep a record of the number of people they rescued, but no names. If we wanted to check names, the best way to check is to ask the DSWD or the evacuation centers. The hashtag #safenow was introduced in 2012 also to, hopefully, track the people who have already been rescued, but all we got were tweets promoting #safenow, and very few actually indicating that they have been successfully rescued and/or are safe.
- **Filtering Problem** - In succeeding typhoons/instances of flooding, we began to have a filtering problem, especially when high-profile Twitter users (i.e., pop-culture celebrities) began to promote the hashtags through Twitter. The actual tweets that were calls for rescue were being drowned by retweets from fans, resulting in many nonrescue-related tweets such as:



VI. Other Notes

Use of Hashtags in Facebook

Facebook only recently updated their system to use hashtags in their platform. While our coordination networks through Twitter have already been implemented, we have yet to replicate the same on Facebook. Nevertheless, Facebook is still the most-used social media platform in the country, and is invaluable for information dissemination.

Success of #lubaktonormal

The rains caused by the 2012 Habagat has damaged national roads, inconvenienced motorists, and posing difficulty for rescue operations. After the floods subsided, the government called on the public to identify and report potholes and cracks on the national highways of Metro Manila by tweeting pictures and details of these to the official Twitter account of the PCDSPO, and by using the hashtag #lubak2normal. The information submitted was entered into a database maintained by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) for immediate action.

The response from the public and media was immediate and positive, with news outfits such as *Rappler* and *Yahoo! Philippines* publishing stories on the program within two hours of the launch. The hashtag #lubak2normal was used **1,007** times within **2** hours after it was launched.

The reports were published and locations mapped out, viewable through a page hosted on the PCDSPO website (<http://pcdsp.gov.ph/lubak2normal/>). Considering the feedback, we considered the hashtag a success. We attribute this to two things: one, we used a platform that was convenient for the public to report directly to the government; and two, the hashtag appealed to humor (lubak means potholes or rubble in the vernacular). Furthermore, due to the novelty of it, the media had no qualms helping us spread the word. All the reports we gathered were immediately endorsed to the DPWH for roadwork and repair.