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Author: Ms. Annelie Schoenmaker
Zero2infinity, Spain, as@inbloon.com

COMMUNITY REMOTE SENSING FOR DISASTER MONITORING: A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

Community remote sensing (CRS) has the particularity of using multiple types of location data and sources. Analyzing and combining all or some of these different types of data creates a new set of data from which information can be extracted leading to new knowledge. It is the fact of combining all this information that creates a more accurate picture of the situation at hand, whether it is for humanitarian response after a natural disaster, for a scientific study of an ecosystem, for an applied use such as microweather predictions in mountainous country, or many other uses.

In the case of disaster management, CRS may involve remote sensing professionals on a volunteer basis. A good example of this is the creation of the GISCorps where volunteer experts collaborate on-line through wikis to produce information about a disaster-struck area. Even with just a few volunteers working around the world in their various time zones, information derived from satellite data can be produced very quickly and sent to relief workers to help them prioritize responses and understand the local situation.

As with every human activity, legal issues need to be taken into consideration. At each stage of a CRS project – data collection, data access and usage, sharing and distribution of data and/or information – some legal threats can be found and it is important to be aware of them before embarking on a CRS project.

There are four main legal concerns, first identified by Kevin Pomfret: privacy, intellectual property rights, liability and national security. Failure to address these legal issues when considering a CRS initiative may eventually harm the project or have negative impacts on future projects.

This presentation will focus on these legal issues, explain them in a clear and concise way and will present existing initiatives such as Creative Commons and other potential way forwards to make CRS a better and more reliable tool for disaster monitoring in the future.