

# Disaster-related apps can help you prepare for worst

March 19 2011, By Marc Saltzman

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While working as a programmer for Disney Animation Studios in Burbank, Calif., two years ago, Terence Worley felt the ground rumble and shake beneath his feet. "I reached for my phone to see how close the quake was, and how big. But there wasn't an easy way to get this information," he says. That night, he wrote his first application for the iPhone, called QuakeWatch, designed to track and send warnings about earthquakes based on U.S. Geological Survey data and other feeds.

The App Store download, now with an average user rating of 4.5 stars out of 5, also uses the smartphone's GPS to calculate the user's distance from the epicenter. Users can share this information with their social network on Facebook or Twitter, right from within the app.

"At any given time you can have a wealth of information at your fingertips, which can be incredibly useful during a time of crisis," says Worley, 46, now living in the Washington, D.C., area.

Not surprisingly, since Japan's devastating earthquake and tsunami a week ago, the 99-cent QuakeWatch app (also available for the [iPad](#)) has rocketed to the top of the paid news apps chart, now No. 1 in the U.S., United Kingdom, Canada and other countries.

Other apps are experiencing the same surge in downloads. Disaster Alert, a free app for iOS devices ([iPhone](#), iPod Touch and iPad) and Google's [Android](#) platform, sees about 3,500 downloads a week on average, but that number tripled after the events in Japan, along with an

additional 12,000 downloads for the new Android version.

Disaster Alert provides instant access to global "active hazards," including weather-related disasters-such as tsunamis, cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons-as well as earthquakes and volcanoes. The app serves as a mobile version of the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC), a government-funded organization that develops and applies information and technology solutions to foster disaster-resilient communities.

Because Disaster Alert monitors multiple agencies in real time, PDC's executive director Ray Shirkhodai in Maui says information about events can be seen in the app up to 30 minutes before mainstream media can broadcast the message. "Last Friday, for example, we received a thank-you from someone in Hawaii who was able to fill up their tank before anyone else knew about the tsunami," recalls Shirkhodai.

A few other apps that can help smartphone or tablet users stay informed, prepared or in touch:

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-Disaster Readiness (\$1.99; for iPhone, Android): Developed by Phoneflips, this app is designed to help smartphone and tablet users

prepare for and manage through a number of emergency situations-be it natural disasters, nuclear radiation, house fires or terrorist attacks. Sections cover checklists, shelters, supplies, evacuation procedures, electricity shortages, water purification , and more.

-Disaster Alert (\$24.99 for lifetime access; for BlackBerry): Available at BlackBerry App World, Disaster Alert lets you access information about worldwide natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, and displays your geographical location on a map in relation to the disaster area. Skylab Mobilesystems' app provides up-to-date information and features a color- and image-coded system to give BlackBerry users a sense of magnitude for each disaster.

-American Red Cross: Shelter View (free; for iPhone): Should disaster strike, know when and where shelters have been opened to provide assistance to you or loved ones. The app provides map location and relevant details of open shelters from the Red Cross National Shelter System, which contains information about 60,000 potential disaster facilities around the world. Shelter information is updated every 30 minutes.

-Emergency Radio (99 cents; for iPhone): This police-scanner app delivers thousands of live radio feeds, such as police, fire, EMS and air traffic. EdgeRift's popular [app](#) lets you organize all frequencies by location, most listened-to, recently added and favorites. Each listing provides information, number of listeners, map view and more.

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