



# Success Story: Azusa Police Department



*Responded to questions across multiple channels*



*Saved time by scheduling posts*



*Used hashtags to tap into relevant conversations*



*Had direct communication between public & police department*

## As Wildfires Burn, Social Media Helps Police Save Lives

On January 16, 2014, a massive fire started just outside the quiet city of Azusa, California. Named for the wilderness trail near its ignition point, the Colby Fire spread rapidly. As the crisis escalated, 1,500 firefighters and law enforcement officers fought for the homes, businesses, and lives of the 46,000-person community. To keep the area's citizens safe, calm and well informed, the [Azusa Police Department](#) turned to social media.

Social media was integral to the team's communication during emergency response. It helped:

- Disseminate official information to the public and media
- Reduce calls to overloaded 911 dispatchers by answering non-emergency concerns on social media
- Create a direct line of communication between the public and police department
- Strengthen Azusa Police Department's relationship with the community



## Introduction to the Azusa Police Department

The City of Azusa is located just outside of downtown Los Angeles, California. Today, the Azusa Police Department has 63 sworn-in police officers providing law enforcement services 24/7.

In late 2012, Officer Mike Bires' passion for social media and 21 years of law enforcement experience led him to develop a [Social Media Program for the police department](#). The program's mission is to connect the department with the public via social media by sharing information, stories and educational insight.

On January 1, 2014, the Azusa Police Department officially launched their Social Media Program, led by Officer Bires. Just 15 days later, the Colby Fire broke out and put their Social Media Program to the ultimate test.

## Social Media Emergency Response: Trial by Fire

The Colby Fire started just outside of the City of Azusa and quickly spread toward some northern Azusa neighborhoods. Mandatory evacuations were immediately ordered for all residences in the area. Over the next 60 hours, the Colby Fire forced the regions' communities to work together and fight for their homes and safety.

To effectively listen to and engage with concerned citizens, while relaying important updates, Officer Bires' team turned to social media. Over the course of the next three days, his team shared 5,991 emails and 9,380 texts. Their social messages reached an average of 3,000 citizens per day and saw more than 10,000 website visitors. Reaching this many people on social media would not have been possible without a social media platform to manage conversations and team members.

"Everyone looked to us for information. Local and national news sources referenced our social feeds for fire updates. Citizens turned to us for trusted information and support. We didn't disappoint."—Officer Mike Bires

"Hootsuite gave us the ability to create one message and publish it across all our accounts at the same time. This was great for the fire, because we pushed safety messages out to a range of followers in our department, police association, PIO and other accounts, regardless of where they were most active"

*Officer Mike Bires*

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## Achieving the Outreach Necessary in an Emergency

To monitor the influx of inquiries across several social media platforms, the Azusa Police Department's social team used Hootsuite. Managing all their accounts from one central dashboard allowed them to handle the incoming inquiries and broadcast responses across multiple channels.

Using Hootsuite, the team achieved the level of outreach and monitoring they needed by setting up relevant Twitter search streams and specific hashtags. For example, their team monitored #ColbyFire to tap into relevant conversations and provide real time answers. The team used any available time to schedule social messages with informative links and safety tips. Using the scheduling feature in Hootsuite freed up the team to respond to resident's questions in real time, directly from the dashboard.

Once the Colby Fire was controlled and people returned to their homes, there was an outpouring of support across all major social networks from residents thanking everyone involved. The fire not only pulled the community together to fight for the same cause, but also strengthened the public's relationship with the Azusa Police. Social media was an integral resource for strengthening the community and getting trusted information out quickly.

"While firefighters and other law enforcement officers fought the fire on the ground, our team kept the community well informed, calm and out of harm's way"

*Officer Mike Bires*

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