

17-001: A Shake That Never Happened		
Agency: US Geological Survey (USGS)	Topic(s):	Error message / human error
Date: 06-23-17	Platform:	Twitter/Email

Sometimes, US Geological Survey (USGS) computers have 6.8 sized hiccups which automatically pushed out info this past Wednesday. This caused serious concern as numerous Emergency Management professionals and PIOs desperately searched to verify information on any earthquake in California. None was to be found on Wednesday June 21, 2017.

As you can see, the date listed in the email notification isn't consistent with Wednesday's date as well as the time stamp of publication. Even worse was the 140-character tweet with even less text/info that initially went out to their 679K followers (@USGS). With the magnitude and epicenter location in a well populated area (Santa Barbara CA), it is crucial that we have multiple sources to verify critical information.

As humans, our attention span has shortened. (SQUIRREL!) Likely thousands misread the initial date/time listed on the email. Even less took the time to click the link in the tweet.

USGS noticed the error and posted this explanation of the errand info. Emails were sent to explain the deleted event. Obviously more than 140 characters, they screen shot a typed response and posted the image to twitter referencing their errant tweet. The USGS used this tactic to get more information and characters into an otherwise short 140-character tweet.

Whether computer or human error, fessing up to an error on social media is embarrassing. However, the ramifications of arbitrarily deleting info without prior public notification will gander your agency a rash of criticism from the most loyal of followers. Government agencies should strive to foster trust and transparency with all of their constituency. Not to mention, deletion of your posts must match your agency's policy/procedure or SOP/SOG.

Three important tips to consider if an agency posts something weird:

- 1. Trust, but verify information. Trust your social media intuition.**
- 2. Correlate data from various sources to make an informed decision for ongoing operations.**
- 3. Admit your mistakes. It happens. Human error is a thing.**

Mistakes happen, but how you recover will either make you a hero or a zero. Maximize your efforts on social media including screenshots of your more-than-140-character-response. Time is short, so tweet / email correct stuff!

2025-06-29 14:42:16 (M6.8) SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL, CALIF. 34.3 -119.8 (847c6)
Yesterday at 20:24

[M6.8 - SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL, CALIF.](#)

Preliminary Earthquake Report

Magnitude	6.8
Date-Time	29 Jun 2025 14:42:16 UTC 29 Jun 2025 07:42:16 near epicenter 29 Jun 2025 09:42:16 standard time in your timezone
Location	34.300N 119.800W

2025-06-29 14:42:16 DELETED: (M6.8) SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL, CALIF. 34.3 -119.8 (847c6)
Yesterday at 21:18

DELETED: Event ci [37161284](#)

== EVENT DELETED NOTIFICATION ==

This event has been deleted after review by a seismologist.

Geographic coordinates:	34.300N, 119.800W
Magnitude:	6.8
Universal Time (UTC):	29 Jun 2025 14:42:16
Time near the Epicenter:	29 Jun 2025 07:42:16

An errant earthquake notification was distributed at 4:49pm PDT over the Earthquake Notification System. It was caused by a revision of the historic 1925 M6.8 Santa Barbara earthquake and was misinterpreted by software as a current event. We are working to resolve the issue. |

USGS @USGS-1d
Regarding: twitter.com/usgs/status/87...

