



## EVENT REPORT

# ISCRAM2008: The Fifth International Conference on Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management, Washington DC, May 4-7 2008

*Frank Fiedrich, ISCRAM2008 Program Chair*

*Bartel Van de Walle, ISCRAM2008 Conference Co-Chair and Tilburg University,  
The Netherlands*

Early last May, more than 200 people gathered in Washington DC for the fifth annual meeting of the ISCRAM R&D community – with ISCRAM short for Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management. Academics, practitioners, students and policy makers could attend a variety of paper presentations, panel discussions, technical demonstration sessions and – not less important – some excellent social activities. All conference activities, technical and other, were kept on track by the excellent local organizing team of Professors Frank Fiedrich and Jack Harrauld of George Washington University.

Traditionally, the conference runs from Monday morning till Wednesday evening, and is preceded by two important events on Sunday: the PhD student Colloquium and the ‘informal getting together’ at a local pub. While the latter is a cheerful opportunity for ISCRAM members to meet up and socialize before the serious work begins, the PhD Colloquium is an intense day of hard work for the PhD students who have

been selected to participate. From about 30 participants, 10 students are invited to present their work, and are then given detailed advice or suggestions by their peers and a group of senior researchers in the domain. Under the leadership of Dr. Jonas Landgren (Viktoria Institute, Sweden) and Professor Leysia Palen (Colorado University, USA), the PhD students take back home valuable recommendations on their work.

Equally traditionally, the conference is kicked off by an excellent keynote on Monday morning, this time by Professor Ben Shneiderman from the University of Maryland in the USA. In his keynote, Professor Shneiderman focused on the new opportunities for disaster and emergency prevention, response, and recovery offered by the remarkable social connectivity generated by today’s networking services. Innovative socio-technical systems can be harnessed to strengthen communities in ways that can prevent some disasters, raise resident awareness of dangers, and prepare them to cope

Figure 1. SAHANA and Humanitarian FOSS at the ISCRAM2008 demo session (from left to right Chamindra de Silva and Trishan de Lanerolle)



more effectively. Studying these innovative solutions and validating their effectiveness will require new research methods and a fresh outlook that Professor Shneiderman defined as “*Science 2.0*” – a term which provoked continued discussion at the conference following this exciting presentation.

Following this opening keynote, the conference participants then could move to one of the different parallel sessions that were offered continuously throughout the entire conference program. Each of the sessions provided for a variety of presentations, with a focus ranging from technical to social perspectives and back. In total, the program provided for more than 20 dedicated session themes, including Geographic Information Systems, IT Governance, IT Security, Command and Control Systems, Intelligent Systems, Visualization, Information Overload, Human-Computer Interaction, Research Methods, and Information Systems for Humanitarian Operations.

A most interesting closing of the first day was the panel organized by Professor Murray Turoff (New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA) on « *Information Seeking Behavior and Needs of Emergency Preparedness and Management Practitioners* », in which selected panelists discussed the findings of a recent report to the National Library of Medicine focusing on the problems of information overload and information seeking by emergency response practitioners.

The second day started with a keynote from Joe Becker, Senior Vice President of Disaster Services for the American Red Cross and leading the organization’s disaster relief. Joe Becker was leading the organization’s largest US relief effort to date for Hurricane Katrina. In his presentation, Joe Becker described the many challenges and opportunities that Red Cross faces every day during a disaster and where the organization is going in the area of technology to better serve America. This talk

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