

Extreme Weather: How a storm of false and misleading claims about extreme weather events spread unchecked on social media, putting lives at risk

By Center for Countering Digital Hate
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As Texas Reels from Fatal Floods, CCDH Reveals How Conspiracies About Extreme Weather Spread Faster Than Life-Saving Alerts.

WASHINGTON, DC - July 22, 2025: New research from the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) reveals that the four leading social media platforms actively enable and profit from false information around extreme weather events, leading to increased risks to public safety, impeded emergency response, and erosion of public trust in disaster relief efforts. This new CCDH report reveals how, in the wake of extreme weather tragedies over the past year such as the Texas floods, LA fires, and Hurricane Helene, social media platforms amplified conspiracy theorists while sidelining vital emergency information, putting lives at risk.

“While families mourned and first responders combed through wreckage after climate disasters in Texas and California, social media companies shamelessly exploited these catastrophes for profit. The rapid spread of climate conspiracies online isn’t accidental, it’s baked into a business model that profits from outrage and division,” **said Imran Ahmed, CEO of CCDH.** “LA County officials told me that after the fires earlier this year, scammers placed social media ads impersonating federal emergency aid agencies to steal victims’ personal information. When distraught people can’t distinguish real help from online deception, platforms become complicit in the suffering of innocent people.”

Key Findings

Researchers analyzed 100 viral posts on each of three major platforms during recent extreme weather events, including the LA fires and Hurricanes Helene and

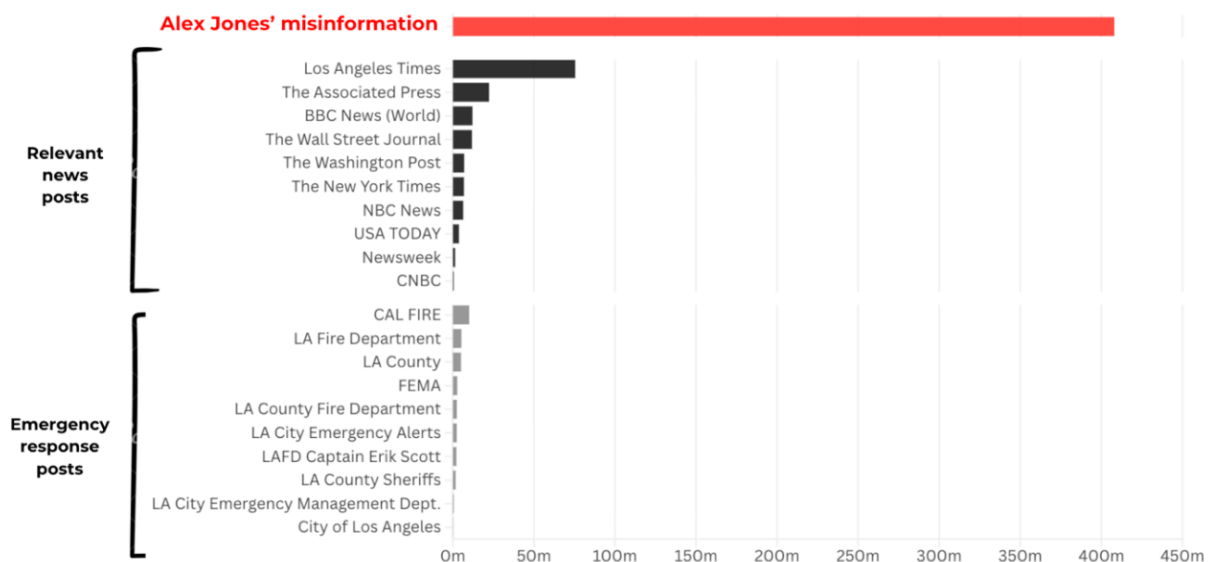
Milton. They found:

- **Meta (Facebook & Instagram)** lacked fact-checks or Community Notes on **98%** of posts analyzed.
- **X** lacked fact-checks or Community Notes on **99%** of posts analyzed.
- **YouTube** failed entirely, with zero fact-checks or Community Notes on **100%** of posts analyzed.

The influence of high-profile conspiracy theorists during climate disasters is drowning out emergency response efforts. For instance:

- Alex Jones' false claims during the LA wildfires, including conspiracies about food confiscation and "globalist" plots, amassed more views on X than the combined reach of FEMA, the LA Times, and ten major news outlets and emergency agencies from January 7th – January 31st, 2025.

Comparing views on Alex Jones' X posts to reliable sources



The study also reveals that verified users who receive enhanced visibility and monetization privileges are among the worst offenders:

- **88%** of misleading extreme weather posts on X came from verified accounts.
- **73%** of such posts on YouTube were from verified accounts.
- **64%** on Meta were from verified accounts.

"It is appalling that see how the climate science deniers and conspiracy theorists catalogued in DeSmog's database are manipulating extreme weather events to disseminate their fact-free fallacies. However, perhaps even more shocking is that social media companies are actively profiting from the disinformation that spreads like wildfire on their platforms," **said Sam Bright, DeSmog's UK deputy**

editor. “This report unequivocally shows that climate disinformation costs lives. As extreme weather events become more and more frequent, these falsehoods will only get more dangerous.”

Recent disasters revealed a dangerous pattern where falsehoods outpaced facts in weather disasters. Following Hurricanes Helene and Milton in late 2024 and the LA fires in early 2025, conspiracy theories flooded social media—baseless claims that hurricanes were “[geo-engineered weapons](#)” and wildfires were ignited by “[government lasers](#)” spread faster than updates from emergency officials and reliable news outlets. [Lies that migrants were prioritized for aid incited public anger](#), while scammers exploited survivors through ads impersonating federal assistance programs. In one alarming case, a man influenced by online lies was arrested for [threatening FEMA personnel](#) at a relief site.

This report examines various themes in false or misleading posts about extreme weather, including:

- **Misleading claims about the causes of severe weather events**, e.g. false claims that the LA wildfires were intentionally set as part of a “globalist plot” or hurricanes controlled by “weather weapon technology”.
- **Misleading claims about disaster relief aid**, e.g. misleading claims about the availability of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relief funds, the use of FEMA budgets, and eligibility criteria for citizens accessing funds.
- **Misleading claims about emergency responses**, e.g. that firefighters failed to act and misleading claims about the availability of water for tackling wildfires.
- **Misleading claims about the impact of climate change**, e.g. misleading interpretations of data to suggest that the intensity and number of hurricanes is decreasing, or false characterizations of climate science as alarmism.
- **Misleading claims about political responses**, e.g. false claims that the Biden administration halted aid to hurricane victims, or that the LA wildfire water shortage was a result of environmental policies to protect a fish species.

Notes to Editors

Full research can be found [here](#).

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact media@counterhate.com

Methodology

Researchers identified 300 false or misleading extreme weather posts with 221m views

To study the spread of false or misleading claims about extreme weather events online, researchers studied 300 of the most-liked posts promoting these claims, comprising:

- 100 posts from Meta's platforms, Facebook (68 posts) and Instagram (32 posts)
- 100 posts from YouTube
- 100 posts from X

All posts studied were made between April 1st, 2023 and April 1st, 2025. Together, these posts amassed 221,418,362 views across all platforms studied. Researchers analyzed these posts to test how often the posts feature fact-checks, carry advertising or display a 'verified' badge next to the poster's name. They also examined ways in which misleading posts can generate income for posters and platforms.

The Online Deniers Dataset

To identify posts for study researchers used the **Online Deniers Dataset (ODD)**, a new dataset compiled by the Center for Countering Digital Hate that enables cross-platform analysis of social media posts from prominent climate change deniers identified by the climate journalism non-profit DeSmog.

Using this dataset, researchers identified posts from prominent climate deniers that match keywords relating to extreme weather events, such as "hurricane", "flooding", "LA fires" and "wildfire", as well as terms relevant to common misleading narratives such as "FEMA", "emergency response" and "blockade".

Identifying the most-liked false or misleading posts

Matching posts were then ranked by likes and labeled by an AI tool designed to identify posts likely to contain false or misleading claims about extreme weather. These labels were used to assist researchers in identifying the 100 most-liked posts promoting false or misleading claims about extreme weather for each company studied.

Each post in the final set of 300 used for this study was agreed by two researchers

to be false or misleading, with a link to an independent fact-check justifying that assessment.

[Read the full report here.](#)