

Town of Middlebury
Emergency Management Bulletin
March 23, 2020 Noon

**RUMORS, SENSATIONALISM, AND EXPLOITATION
IN THE CONTAGION ENVIRONMENT**

There have been efforts recently to propagate fear and dissention in the COVID-19 health crisis. Many rumors are being spread through disinformation originated by both foreign and domestic actors. We recommend that you obtain your information through authentic, reliable sources. The Vermont State Emergency Operations Center distributes a daily bulletin. Information is likewise posted on the Vermont Department of Health web site at: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/>. Updated and resourceful information is also posted by the UVM Health Network at: [UVMHealth.org/coronavirus](https://www.portermedical.org/coronavirus-covid-19-information-updates/) and at Porter Hospital: <https://www.portermedical.org/coronavirus-covid-19-information-updates/>

Rumor: The Vermont Army National Guard has been activated to enforce martial law.

Fact: The guard HAS been activated to assist with medical surge and the distribution of medical supplies to EMS and health care workers from the National Stockpile and are on stand-by for other civil support duties, none of which include patrolling streets and detaining people. There is no martial law.

Rumor: Camp Johnson is being emptied to prepare for a detention center for mass arrests.

Fact: There is no foundation for this at all.

Rumor: The Middlebury Sports Center is being prepped as a morgue for mass deaths.

Fact: No such effort is underway.

Rumor: People under 40 don't have to worry about COVID-19. It's just like getting a cold.

Fact: no person, regardless of age, has any inherent immunity to this disease and all ages are susceptible to serious illness, although elderly people are at highest risk for serious effects. However, everyone needs to follow isolation guidelines and stay home if sick to avoid spreading COVID-19 in their communities. \

Rumor: Social distancing doesn't work.

Fact: Social distancing can be a very effective public health tool in containing outbreaks and has been used for hundreds of years. It requires dedicated cooperation on the part of all citizens to heed all restrictions on gatherings, etc. for the greater good.

There are a number of other rumors floating about through Facebook and other sites. Get your information from the authoritative sources mentioned here. You can always call the Police Department. The department is open and fully operational.

FRAUDS

The State noted warnings of misinformation and "Spear-phishing" attempts (sending emails ostensibly from a known or trusted sender in order to induce targeted individuals to reveal confidential information). Please keep your antivirus software updated and do not open emails or attachments from unknown sources or send confidential/security information.

Please be wary of email scams and malicious websites that are seeking to exploit the current situation. Vermonters are reminded to follow best practices for safety online, including verifying links in messages before following them, ensuring the legitimacy of websites before visiting them, and being especially skeptical of unusual emails.

"We want people to stay safe as we all navigate this crisis together," Department of Public Safety Commissioner Mike Schirling said. "That includes looking after not only your health, but also the accuracy of information you receive and choose to pass along to others. Be especially wary of unfounded posts on Facebook, links to unknown sources, or text messages that purport to be from someone with special access to insider information. Remember, disinformation can be dangerous."

In addition there have been efforts to have people subscribe to Coronavirus insider information which have turned out to be scams, locking up your computer systems and networks for ransom payments.

Helpful links for additional information:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers a comprehensive, regularly-updated website to dispel disinformation that is circulating online. The direct link is <https://www.fema.gov/Coronavirus-Rumor-Control>.

Additional resources include:

- **FEMA:** The agency offers a comprehensive overview of the virus and the government's response efforts. (<https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus>)
- **PolitiFact:** The trusted news organization provides a list of seven tips on how to avoid falling for falsehoods surrounding the pandemic. (<https://bit.ly/COVIDfactcheck>)
- **The Journalist's Toolbox:** This service by the Society of Professional Journalists offers an ever-expanding list of verified links to official sources of information and data. (<https://bit.ly/ToolboxLinks>)
- [FBI.gov](https://www.fbi.gov)
- **Vermont State Police:** vsp.vermont.gov/covid19/avoiding_disinformation

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