TIME – THE FINAL FRONTIER

GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGY NEEDS TO BECOME GEOTEMPORAL AS WELL, IF ITS FULL POTENTIAL IS TO BE EXPLOITED, SAYS **ALISTAIR MACLENAN**

The population of the United States has a problem with drugs. On average, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services, 130 Americans die every day by overdosing on opioids, making it the leading cause of accidental death in the country – Americans are more likely to die of a drug overdose than in a car accident.

National action against the abuse of opioids – a group of drugs that includes heroin, codeine, morphine and fentanyl – started in earnest in 2007 when the federal government took successful and ongoing legal action against the producer of OxyContin. The current White House administration has declared the opioid crisis to be a public health emergency.

However, practical steps are also being taking at a local level by those who find themselves on the front line and some are turning to maps for help.

Writing recently in the Journal of Pediatric Health Care, researchers from New York University's Rory Meyers College of Nursing have described how nurses are relying on real-time GIS maps to provide drug-prevention information in the right places. In this case, 'right' translates as those places with the highest concentrations of overdoses.

New York's fire department collects data from all the city's boroughs and its staff continually update a GIS map of the city, including those opioid hotspots. Armed with this information, nurses visit the high-risk areas more often where they can talk to those prescribing drugs about alternative therapies and make timely interventions with those in danger of overdosing.

The project was a success because knowing where to act and being able to act within the time frame of an event is as important as knowing what to do if you want to effect any kind of meaningful change.

Geospatial technology has a long history of being called upon as a witness.

In the world (or should that be above the world?) of earth observation, operators of constellations of nanosatellites no longer chase ever more detailed spatial resolutions. Instead, they understand how powerful it is to be able to provide a new image of the planet every day.

Organisations tasked with policing the world's forests now have the tool they need to stop offenders before they do any more damage than is possible in a day. It is a step up from simply wringing their hands about how terrible the situation is getting.

Additionally, many cities have networks of air-quality sensors and can display this information on online maps. A simple glance at these enables people to decide if they would like to travel somewhere, rather

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Deforestation reports are full of forlorn satellite images showing scarred landscapes where trees used to flourish. Because it usually takes around 16 days for a single satellite to return to the same spot, the eco-criminals can be far away, counting their money and keeping themselves warm next to a suspiciously well-stocked wood burning stove.

But, as the nurses example shows, the role of geospatial is changing and it is vital that increases in temporal resolution continue if the industry is to fulfil its potential.

than finding out their life expectations have been shortened once they have returned.

There have been barriers to geospatial technology becoming a mainstream application but the creation of 'real-time geo' will clear a few of those with a single leap. Of course, it is challenging to provide information within the time frame of an event, but the more geospatial applications concentrate on doing that, the more they will be used and by more people.
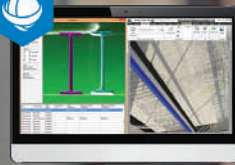
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