Extreme Heat Guide

for

Local Government

in

South Australia

December 2014
## Document Version Control

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Background

In Australia during the 20th century, heatwaves caused more deaths than any other natural hazard. In 1939 alone, a heatwave in southern Australia caused 438 deaths and seriously affected many thousands.

An exceptional heatwave affected south-eastern Australia during late January and early February 2009. Widespread very hot conditions began to develop in the southeast from 27 January and continued for approximately two weeks. In southern South Australia temperatures widely reached their highest levels since at least 1939.

Climate change modelling predicts a 35% increase in extreme heat days in the next 20 years which emphasises the role of the extreme heat planning within Local Government's Climate Change Adaptation strategies.

State Extreme Heat Plan

Key South Australian Government departments, led by the State Emergency Service (SASES) as the Hazard Leader for Extreme Weather under State Emergency Management arrangements, have worked together to prepare an Extreme Heat Arrangements Annex to the Extreme Weather Hazard Plan which ensures a coordinated approach to increasing community preparedness, awareness and response to extreme heat events.

The aim of the Extreme Heat Arrangements is for government agencies to work together to effectively deliver timely and accurate advice and support to the South Australian community.

Triggers for the activation of the Extreme Heat Arrangements

The trigger for providing advice to the public about the risk of an extreme heat event commences with the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) temperature predictions.

The Extreme Heat Arrangements trigger points for various actions are based on a formula using the average daily temperature (ADT). The average daily temperature is calculated by dividing the total of the maximum day and the minimum overnight temperature by two.

Throughout the summer the SES works closely with the BOM on a daily basis to predict the ADT and initiate appropriate action.

Warning messages

When an ADT of 32C or above is predicted for three or more consecutive days the SES will issue an Extreme Heat WARNING to the public via media release where practical up to 24 hours in advance of the event.

It is recommended that Councils adopt this same trigger for any response they are intending to make. That is at the “warning” stage they commence the implementation of their plan.

The Extreme Heat Warning messages will be posted to the following websites:

- Bureau of Meteorology www.bom.gov.au
- State Emergency Service www.ses.sa.gov.au
Legislative Context as it applies to Local Government


Local Government Role in Extreme Heat Planning

Councils when considering their role in extreme heat planning should manage their participation to an extent that is reasonable within their circumstances.

The primary role of Local Government should be to promote community awareness and education about the dangers of heat stress and the measures that can be adopted to mitigate the effect. This includes reinforcement of the health messages promoted by appropriate Government agencies such as the SASES and the Department of Health. Refer to: http://www.ses.sa.gov.au/site/community_safety/heatsafe/extreme_heat_plan.jsp and http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/health+topics/health+topics+a+-+z/heat

Councils should complement and support existing HACC and Red Cross programs but not be a provider of a duplicate service. Information about the Red Cross Telecross REDi program is available at: http://www.redcross.org.au/telecross-redi.aspx

Council Facilities

The SASES in the State Extreme Heat Plan does not recommend the establishment of specific “cooling centres” by State, Local Government or community groups. However the extension of operating or opening hours of existing facilities and services is encouraged. If Councils choose this option they should clearly indicate that it is the extension of an existing service and not create a community perception that additional services are being offered.

Councils may choose to make community facilities such as community centres, libraries, theatres, halls, swimming centres and sports stadiums available during extreme heat events but in doing so should recognise that there maybe significant cost and risk issues involved.

Any decision should carefully consider the logistics associated with management of the facilities such as staffing, security, medical assistance, public liability, infrastructure and air-conditioning, maintenance, cleaning, catering, amenities and hygiene etc.

If Councils elect to extend the operating hours of existing facilities and services they should consult with LGA MLS about the management of risk associated with the extended service being offered. The LGA MLS has a checklist that will assist Councils to manage this risk. Annexure A outlines the issues that will be addressed.

To be selective about the access and usage of community facilities during an extreme heat event could attract liability risks to Council. Councils need to acknowledge that if they offer Council facilities during extreme heat events they will need to be made available to the community at large.

Vulnerable Persons
The State Government through the Department of Families and Communities is the principle agency responsible for vulnerable persons in the community. Local Government should be wary of assuming a lead role in this area, but should offer its support and assistance.

The provision of specific assistance/services to defined “vulnerable persons” during an extreme heat event is more properly provided by existing organisations, established to provide these services. Telecross REDI is endorsed by the State Government and assists vulnerable and isolated people to prepare for and cope with extreme weather events.

The HACC program currently offers a well planned and organised assistance programme relevant to heat stress/relief management, which is capable of being enhanced and supported by “Telecross REDI”.

**Bushfire Danger Rating**

Extreme Heat planning by Local Government should not occur in isolation but should include appropriate consideration of issues associated with Council staff performing work in high bushfire risk areas on high fire danger days. This is a particularly important aspect if consideration is being given to opening Council facilities to the public on high fire danger days.

A CFS message to leave home early to avoid a fire threat must take precedence over a SASES message to stay at home for refuge from an extreme heat event.

**Staff Welfare**

The health and safety of personnel is paramount during extreme heat events where risks of fatigue and heat related illness such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke are evident. Councils should conduct appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of their staff.

**Conclusion**

The State Extreme Heat Plan anticipates that Local Government will continue to provide its current services/facilities, while responding to the impact of a greater demand during an Extreme Heat Event.

Councils will be most effective by:

a) acting as an information or guidance source for persons needing additional assistance and/or support during an Extreme Heat Event;

b) ensuring that Council acts as a participating organisation/stakeholder to the SASES Extreme Heat Arrangements. The community will only be confused and uncertain if a Council attempts to offer an alternative or additional service to that already being provided by recognised “emergency management” entities (such as SASES and Red Cross);

c) understanding the formal “trigger” factors that have been implemented by the SASES for an Extreme Heat Event;

d) ensuring that clear communication processes are developed to receive, understand and impart extreme heat messages from the SASES;

e) considering enhancements to current services and facilities available to the local community to cope with anticipated increased demands of an extreme heat event.

f) developing Business Continuity Plans that anticipate and mitigate the business disruption that may occur during extreme heat events.
Councils can, with the assistance of the LGAMLS, complement the State Government’s Extreme Heat Arrangements and at the same time limit the duplication of services.

Annexure A – Community Facilities Check List

- Ability to cope with large numbers
- Ability to accommodate long periods of stay, including overnight
- Adequacy of kitchen, toilet, shower, laundry facilities
- Adequate number of trained volunteers/staff (OHS issues)
- Availability of relevant Staff (including OHS compliance)
- Adequacy of security, housekeeping inside and surrounds outside
- Availability of relevant first aid to respond to health issues
- Fire and other evacuations (access, egress) processes in accordance with “change of use”
- Adequacy of lighting, heating, cooling, shade
- Access to other emergency services
- Access to food, water
- Adequacy of furniture, air-conditioning and other infrastructure