



**Local Government Association**  
of South Australia



**An Australian Government Initiative**

*Working Together to Manage Emergencies*

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# **Emergency Management Plans**

## **Guidelines for Local Council Emergency Management Planning**

March 2006

## Overview

The Emergency Management Act 2004 defines an emergency as:

‘... an event that causes, or threatens to cause—

- (a) the death of, or injury or other damage to the health of, any person; or
- (b) the destruction of, or damage to, any property; or
- (c) a disruption to essential services or to services usually enjoyed by the community; or
- (d) harm to the environment, or to flora or fauna;

### **Note —**

This is not limited to naturally occurring events (such as earthquakes, floods or storms) but would, for example, include fires, explosions, accidents, epidemics, hi-jacks, sieges, riots, acts of terrorism or other hostilities directed by an enemy against Australia.’

An emergency has one or all of the following characteristics:

- Disruptive to individuals and communities
- Outside of normal life expectations
- Unpredictable in occurrence and effect
- Require responses for which normal local resources may be inadequate
- Wide range of effects and impacts on human and physical environment
- Generate complex needs

The following words were written with natural disasters in mind, but apply equally to man-made disasters.

*‘When natural disaster strikes, lives are thrown into chaos, houses, businesses and community infrastructure get damaged or destroyed, people’s livelihoods are temporarily (and sometimes permanently) disrupted and, most significantly, people get hurt and sometimes killed. Beyond these physical effects are the mental and psychological stress suffered by those involved, often for a long time after the disaster has faded from most people’s memories. These impacts can all be devastating to individuals and the community as a whole.*

*For these reasons, governments and communities take action to reduce the impact of disasters. The action is usually in the form of expenditure on preparation, prevention, response and mitigation.’*

(The Bureau of Transport Economics Report 103 (2001), page 19)

## Introduction

Engaging Councils and increasing awareness of emergency management issues is a vital step in improving national preparedness for a range of events, including natural disasters and terrorism. Emergency management planning is about being prepared for events or incidents that stretch our ability to cope beyond our normal day-to-day capacity. While an emergency event can be devastating in its own right, by preparing as much as possible we can reduce its impact and speed the recovery process. In some cases being prepared can help prevent an emergency situation from turning into another kind of crisis. Planning may not take into account unforeseen events, but it will better prepare an organisation to meet an unforeseen event.

During emergencies, Councils support their communities directly and indirectly by providing resources and information to emergency services and to the community. A Council's ability to handle emergencies can be strongly influenced by its attitudes, preparedness and involvement in emergency management. Local Government is the closest level of government to the community and Councils can deliver on the ground services that other levels of government are not able to.

### **Purpose of these Guidelines**

These Guidelines do not provide a template for Emergency Management plans. Rather, the Guidelines are to help Councils:

- Understand their roles and responsibilities as regards emergency management planning
- Provide advice as to the State and National emergency management framework
- Provide a 'walk through' of the emergency management planning process

### **The Role of Local Government in Emergency Management**

Section 7 (d) of the Local Government Act states that the functions of a Council include 'to take measures to protect its area from natural and other hazards and to mitigate the effects of such hazards'

Section 8 (d) of the Act states that a Council must, in the performance of its roles and functions 'give due weight, in all its plans, policies and activities, to regional, State and national objectives and strategies concerning the economic, social, physical and environmental development and management of the community'

The Act also requires Councils to adopt 'plans' for the management of its local area, collectively referred to as strategic management plans to be of 3-5 years duration. To fulfil the requirements of the Act, Councils need to consider how their strategic management plans and any operational plans have regard to strategies they will adopt to protect the community from natural and other hazards.

Local Government is best placed to determine and respond to local needs and priorities as it is the closest level of government to the community; it has specialised local knowledge about the environment and demographic features of their districts. It is often first port of call for the public during an emergency event. Councils can use their resources to mitigate the effects of emergencies on people, property and infrastructure and play a key role in coordinating the response from the voluntary sector

### **Emergency Management Planning in Context**

Effective emergency management requires a partnership between all levels of government. Each level of government is responsible for varying emergency management roles:

- Commonwealth Responsibility

The Australian Government has no constitutional responsibility for local safety and emergency services, but is responsible for the military defence of Australia and the civil defence of the Australian community during hostilities.

The Commonwealth supports emergency management in the states and territories in a range of ways:

- Funding, e.g. Emergency Management Australia funding, the Bushfire Mitigation Programme and the Natural Disaster Mitigation Programme
- Operational resources, e.g. SA Police
- Meteorological advice, e.g. Bureau of Meteorology
- Policy development and manuals, e.g. Emergency Management Australia publications

- State Responsibility

In South Australia, the Premier is responsible for emergency management and the Emergency Management Act 2004 establishes a framework for the management of emergencies including:

- the establishment, membership, functions and powers of the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC); and
- the management of emergencies, including:
  - their classification as identified major incidents, major emergencies or disasters
  - recovery operations.

The Act replaces the State Disaster Act 1980, and is consistent with the Government's policy on emergency management, protective security and counter-terrorism. It shifts the focus from 'disaster management' to a flexible 'all hazards' framework that applies to planning, coordination and control for any emergency. The Act is 'live' at all times and does not require a formal emergency declaration to become operational.

## **South Australia's Emergency Management Framework**

### The Emergency Management Council

Chaired by the Premier, this is a Cabinet Committee comprising the Attorney General, Treasurer and Ministers for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Police, Emergency Services and Health. It advises Cabinet on all matters in the Emergency Management Act and State Emergency Management Plan, including preparedness and mitigation arrangements for all emergencies, and strategic coordination of emergency management arrangements.

### The State Emergency Management Committee

The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) is a requirement of the Emergency Management Act. Its main functions are:

- leadership and oversight of emergency management planning
- developing and monitoring the State Emergency Management Plan
- advising the Minister on the Emergency Management Act and emergency management

- assessing the risks of emergencies or potential emergencies
- ensuring all agencies and organisations are sufficiently informed to perform their functions
- monitoring agency capacity to carry out EM functions
- coordinating the development and implementation of appropriate strategies and policies
- monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the State Emergency Management Plan and the response and recovery operations taken during major emergencies

Members of SEMC include:

- Chief Executive of Department Premier and Cabinet, who presides over meetings
- State Coordinator (the Commissioner of Police assumes this role)
- Chief Officers of Country Fire Service, Metropolitan Fire Service and State Emergency Service
- Members appointed by the Governor, including one from SA Police, St John Ambulance Service, and the Local Government Association.

Pursuant to Section 11 of the Emergency Management Act 2004, the SEMC has established three Advisory Groups to advise the Committee in relation to emergency Mitigation, Response and Recovery activities.

#### The State Emergency Management Plan

The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) is responsible for the development and maintenance of a State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP). The Plan uses an 'all hazards' approach, recognising the four aspects of prevention, preparation, response, and recovery. The Plan lays down the organisational structure for the participating government agencies, voluntary organisations and private sector organisations. Version 1 of the SEMP has been approved by the State Emergency Management Committee and is binding on all Government agencies; it was developed in October 2005.

#### Zone Emergency Management Committees

Given the extent of South Australia, the State Emergency Management Plan has divided the State into zones. The zones are responsible for the preparation of local emergency management plans and their execution in the event of an emergency. The Zone Emergency Management Committees (ZEMC) are similar in make up to the State Emergency Management Committee with members including the police, the fire services, the State Emergency Service and local councils.

In addition to the Zone Emergency Management Plan, individual member agencies of the zone should prepare their own emergency management plans. The plans for each agency should be carefully constructed to take account of its own role and those of others that it may have to interact with during an emergency. These plans form part of an overall Zone plan, and the Zone plans form part of the overall State Emergency Management Plan.

## **Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery**

The State and Zone Emergency Management Plans take an all hazards approach recognising the four aspects of prevention, preparation, response, and recovery. Prevention and preparedness are undertaken in advance of an emergency, while response and recovery activities are undertaken during an emergency and after it occurs.

### Prevention

Prevention includes the identification of hazards, the assessment of threats to life and property, and consideration of measures to reduce potential loss of life and property damage. Prevention is sometimes called emergency or disaster mitigation. Prevention measures carried out by Councils might include:

- Works under Building Code
- Flood Zone planning
- Urban/ rural interface planning
- Land Use planning
- Street addressing
- Public Health

Prevention measures are important as they can reduce the cost of disasters to the community and help save lives.

### Preparedness

Preparedness includes arrangements or plans to deal with an emergency or the effects of an emergency. Emergency management plans may outline works and activities undertaken by councils for specific emergencies, for example:

- Possibility of a flood emergency – culvert maintenance, creek clearing, drainage and flood maps, sandbagging activities
- Possibility of a fire emergency – maintenance of fire tracks, enforcement of fire permits

Broader measures may also be undertaken, that are not emergency specific, for example the setting up of an emergency management steering group within Council.

### Response

Response is the process of combating an emergency and providing assistance to people affected by the emergency. The aim of response operations is to save lives, protect property and make an affected area safe. Response activities are normally carried out by a number of organisations, including Local Government, State Emergency Service units, police, fire and ambulance. Council specific response activities may include:

- Supply of local technical experts, for example Environmental Health Officers and Building Surveyors, and expert local knowledge
- Supply of equipment

Councils may sometimes be in charge of the initial response activities as they may be first on the scene of an emergency.

## Recovery

Recovery is the process by which an affected community is assisted in regaining a proper level of functioning following an emergency. It comprises initial recovery, which satisfies personal and community needs and restores services to the level where Councils and other responsible agencies can manage the continuing process. It also includes long term recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation measures. Recovery activities that might be carried out by Councils include:

- Restoration of infrastructure and clean up operations
- Provision of emergency accommodation
- Community development

## **Mitigation versus emergency response**

Emergency management has traditionally focused on response and recovery. With the increasing understanding of impact of emergencies, the focus of emergency management planners is broadening to consider mitigation and also the economic, cultural and environmental implications of emergency events. Importantly, the Emergency Management Act specifically requires the mitigation of emergencies and the consideration of risk in addition to response and recovery.

Councils have traditionally written emergency response plans and not considered the mitigation works they are already doing and that they could be doing. In recent years, the focus of emergency management has changed to a risk management approach, concentrating on the hazards that cause emergency events and the mitigation measures that will reduce or remove the emergency threats, or reduce the severity of the effect of the emergency event.

Effective mitigation strategies can reduce economic and social loss from emergency events and contribute to lasting improvements in safety, environmental protection and sustainable development. Hazard mitigation assists Councils to plan for and reduce the impact of emergencies on resources.

## **Council Emergency Management Planning**

A number of Council officers from a range of departments may be involved in developing and implementing Council's emergency management plan. For example, officers from environmental health teams, works and infrastructure teams and community services teams would all play vital roles, as would risk management officers; support from senior managers is essential.

Councils need to take special measures to anticipate how to handle the range of emergency events that may occur in their districts. Plans should consider each emergency situation and develop generic all hazards approach, i.e. principles and arrangements that can be activated in any emergency event.

The Council emergency management plan records a Council's emergency management arrangements and should include:

- Geographic and demographic information on the Council district

- Details of emergency risk analyses that have been undertaken
- Outline of risk reduction strategies
- Arrangements and strategies for the management of response and recovery activities
- Contact details of key Council staff needed during an emergency
- Information on access to resources owned by the Council, e.g. equipment owned by Council, equipment leased by the Council (including leasing provisions) and equipment suppliers in the local area

There will be three main users of the Plan:

- Those involved in the planning process
- Those who will have to apply the plan
- The Community

The Plan needs to

- Provide an emergency management planning overview
- Explain the relationship between parts of the plan and other Council documents
- Be endorsed by Council and have support of both senior management and all those officers listed in the Plan.
- Include contracted out services.

### **Stages involved in developing an emergency management plan**

There are a number of stages in developing an emergency management plan:

- Establish the planning framework and objectives
- Establish Working Groups and assign tasks
- Undertake research
- Carry out hazard analyses, identifying, analysing, assessing and prioritising risks
- Develop strategies to deal with high risks
- Acknowledge residual risks
- Plan and prepare for response and recovery operations
- Compile and evaluate Plan
- Exhibit for comment, Council approval
- Set review dates for plan (at least annually)
- Establish the planning framework and objectives  
Senior management need to clarify the context in which the emergency management planning will be carried out. A range of issues need to be considered, for example considering how the emergency management plan will tie in with other Council plans and policies, applicable legislation, management arrangements and programs, stakeholders, political and economic circumstances and social issues. Consideration should also be given to how the plan will align with regional and state plans.
- Establish Working Groups and assign tasks  
Every day Council functions should be considered and working groups set up which represent each relevant function, for example:
  - General public services

- Health, education and welfare
- Planning and land use
- Property services such as water, drainage, gas, electricity
- Road safety strategies
- Environmental control, protection and conservation

Key stakeholders should be identified, and consideration given to inviting them to some or all of the working group meetings. Consideration should be given to the establishment of sub-groups, for example a health sub-group, or media response sub-group.

- Undertake research

Research can be undertaken by Council to:

- Consider previous emergency events that have occurred in the Council area, and the lessons learned from those events.
- Contact other Councils and agencies to establish how they have dealt with specific emergency events
- Note details of relevant information that is stored on Council databases
- Note details of emergency services organisations, utility providers and industrial facilities in the local area

- Carry out hazard analyses, identifying, analysing, assessing and prioritising risks

Information should be collected to identify all the hazards or risks that may cause emergency events in the Council area. Once identified, the risks should be analysed, assessed and prioritised.

- Develop strategies to deal with high risks and acknowledge residual risks

Some risks can be dealt with and relevant experts can develop strategies for this. Some risks cannot be treated, or may still present a residual risk, which Councils need to develop response and recovery arrangements for.

- Plan and prepare for response and recovery operations

As stated above, response operations are likely to include a range of agencies. Briefings should be sought from responsible agencies and key Council personnel on their approach to their activities, with particular reference to the support roles and tasks expected from Council. Council resources available to help perform the response and recovery tasks should be identified. It is important to remember that many organisations have to work together in the response to an emergency. Therefore Council plans need to link to those of stakeholder organisations.

- Compile and evaluate Plan

Listed below is a suggested plan outline:

*Introductory Information*

Title page

Contents

Statement of endorsement

Mission statement, vision, aim

Purpose of the plan

### *Risk Management Information*

Summary of risk assessment process

Summary of demography, vulnerability profiles, topography, history of emergencies

Summary of risk treatment strategies

### *Operational Management Arrangements*

Working Group details

Break down of Working Group attendee roles

### *Response Arrangements*

Include principles and definitions of command, control and coordination from SEMP

Include details of control and support agencies

### *Recovery Arrangements*

Context of recovery

Activation and notification of recovery arrangements – refer to the SEMP

Council coordination and management arrangements, for example communication with media, the community, dealing with offers of assistance (both people and goods), identifying vulnerable members of the community

### *Ancillary Arrangements*

List relevant functional services within Council area, for example catering, communication, transport and engineering etc

### *Contact Directory*

List contact details of all relevant officers and agencies that will have a role to play

### *Appendices*

Maps – local area, flood, fire etc

Emergency operating centre maps

Any Standard Operating Procedures

Glossary

Distribution list

Bibliography

- Exhibit for comment, Council approval

Once draft emergency management plan is complete, it should be circulated for comment – both within Council and to stakeholders. Views should be sought on content, organisation, presentation, consistency and ease of use. Once the draft plan is approved, Council endorsement or approval should be sought.

- Set review dates for plan and carry out exercises

It is very important to review contact names and numbers, and to keep the plan current. Contact names and numbers should be detailed in a separate Appendix, which can easily be updated, rather than including names and numbers through the body of the plan. Reviews should be carried out at least annually.

### **Useful References**

[www.ema.gov.au](http://www.ema.gov.au)

[www.parliament.sa.gov.au](http://www.parliament.sa.gov.au)

[www.semo.sa.gov.au](http://www.semo.sa.gov.au)

[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

[www.dotars.gov.au](http://www.dotars.gov.au)

[www.safecom.sa.gov.au](http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au)

Emergency Risk Management Applications Guide  
Emergency Management Australia

The Good Practice Guide An Initiative of the National Community Awareness Advisory Group to the National Emergency Management Committee  
Compiled by EMA in conjunction with State and Territory emergency management organisations

Safe SA Communities Guide How to minimise the impact of emergencies on South Australian Communities