

EM Update

Emergency Management Australia provides national leadership in the development of measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters. EM Update provides current information on activities and issues in the emergency management environment across EMA and State and Territory jurisdictions.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY

ACT residents better prepared for emergencies

ACT residents are better prepared for emergencies following the distribution of a new all hazards publication. *Emergencies and the National Capital – A residents guide* was delivered to every household across the Territory throughout November. The guide is the brainchild of the ACT Emergency Services Authority (ESA) and follows the production of a bushfire specific booklet 12 months earlier.

“Emergencies and the National Capital – A residents guide is the next natural progression for the ESA and the people of the ACT,” ESA Commissioner Peter Dunn said. “When we looked at the advice provided for various specific emergencies we found a large part of it was the same no matter what the situation. So we came up with the concept of a guide with a generic all hazards approach,” he said.

In particular there is a three page home emergency plan which households can fill out. This includes checklists for home prevention and preparedness activities, and a home emergency kit. The guide contains advice on what to do if disaster strikes and where to access information updates highlighting the Memorandum of Understanding the ESA has with local media outlets.

The new *ACT All Hazards Warning System* is also detailed in the 16-page publication. “The *All Hazards Warning System* was introduced in the ACT in October 2005 as a way to alert residents to the threat of or the occurrence of major emergencies,” Commissioner Dunn said. “The ESA used the system for the first time when the ACT was struck by damaging storms in November. We issued a BLUE warning for a possible threat and a YELLOW warning for likely impact prior to and as the bad

weather hit. This was followed by a RED warning meaning immediate impact and later on a GREEN warning to initiate recovery,” he said.

“We’ve issued a BLUE warning on a number of occasions since then as well for other forecast storms and when issuing total fire bans for the ACT.

“The resident’s guide is a key tool to educating Canberrans about the warning system and actions they should take. We were able to road test the draft contents with community representatives before signoff, which provided highly valuable feedback which we incorporated in the final version,” he said.

The ESA has moved to ensure ACT residents with special needs can access the guide. “We have produced the guide in large font and Braille formats as well as an audio CD version,” Commissioner Dunn said.

Contents of the guide include:

- ACT All Hazards Warning System;
- ACT Evacuation Strategy;
- Your Home Emergency Plan;
- Bushfires;
- Storms and Floods;
- Home Fire Safety;
- Calling an Ambulance;
- If Disaster Strikes; and
- Emergency Information.

Copies of the *Emergencies and the National Capital – A residents guide* can be downloaded in normal or large print formats from the ESA website www.esa.act.gov.au. Hard copies can be obtained by contacting Community Education Officer Alice Tan Phone: 02 6207 8696.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Working Together to Manage Emergencies

The Australian Government policy initiative, *Working Together to Manage Emergencies*, announced in September 2004, recognises the need to develop self-reliance at both the community and local government levels. It builds national preparedness for disasters of all types by providing practical support and recognition. The initiative comprises two funding programs:

- the *Local Grants Scheme* (LGS), to assist local councils to fund and develop emergency risk initiatives, security upgrades around critical infrastructure and provide training for staff; and
- the *National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund* (NEVSF), offering funding to emergency management volunteer organisations to boost recruitment, retention, skills and training.

On 8 December 2005, the Attorney-General, The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, announced the funding of more than 400 projects, valued at \$14 million through the LGS and NEVSF in financial year 2005/06.

Projects funded through the LGS include assessment of risks to critical infrastructure, emergency risk management planning, community safety publications, and disaster exercises. Projects funded through the NEVSF include public education programs, volunteer recruitment campaigns, establishment and upgrade of sheds and facilities, and volunteer training.

In announcing the successful projects, Mr Ruddock commended all applicants for their commitment to improving community safety and wished the recipients of funding every success with their projects. Applications for funding in 2006/07 closes on 3 March 2006.

A complete list of successful projects under both programs is available on the EMA website at www.ema.gov.au/communitydevelopment

Emergo Train

Emergo Train is a major incident simulation system, developed in Sweden for the health service. The simple system is a variation of a functional exercise and provides a unique opportunity for those involved in planning or managing major incidents to develop their management and decision-making skills in a relatively comfortable environment. The pressures and emotions generated by working with 'real' resources in a real-time situation are simulated using radio and other communication methods as in an actual emergency situation. It allows meaningful exercises to be conducted without disruption to normal services.

The system can be tailored for use by a variety of industries including emergency management planning, hospital and health, Chemical Biological Radiological (CBR), ambulance, police and fire personnel. It is used extensively throughout the European and United Kingdom health care systems.

The system does not require sophisticated equipment. It is based on the use of magnetic symbols on whiteboards to represent patients, staff and resources. Movable markers indicate priorities and treatment regimens. The use of a "delay board" ensures that predetermined, accurately validated times are adhered to and that, with careful monitoring from the instructors, the age-old exercise cliché of events happening "notionally" (or in impossibly short time intervals) are precluded.

Emergo Train is being used initially, and very successfully, to simulate hospital mass casualty situations. Performance indicators are provided for each patient in the system. If stated measures are not performed within defined timeframes there is a risk of the patients suffering an 'unfavourable' outcome.

EMA is co-ordinating a national effort towards embracing this exciting system and two courses were conducted at EMA Mt. Macedon, in February.

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Risk Based Land Use Planning Course

EMA is conducting three courses in 2006 to assist participants in practically applying the risk management framework to land use planning activities. The first course is programmed for the week starting 29 May at EMA Mt. Macedon.

There have been a number of significant developments with this course, which focuses on the practical application of risk based land use principles. The course now attracts Planning Institute of Australia Continuing Professional Development points and by May it will be a nationally accredited and recognised short course.

For more information about this course and other courses that EMA offer please refer to www.ema.gov.au

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT *continued*

EMA Library

ALIES (Australasian Libraries in the Emergency Sector) has long played an important role for EMA as a key information network. ALIES has also recently undertaken work in information management in the wider Australian emergency management context. The annual workshop for ALIES members will be held at EMA Mt. Macedon, April 9-13 2006. Representatives from 35 emergency management related agencies from all States, Territories, the Australian Government and New Zealand will meet to discuss, plan and implement strategies for information sharing across the sector and internationally. The theme this year is "Disasters, terrorism, corruption, crime...a librarian's role in uncertain times".

EMA Library staff continue to provide a high level of support to the emergency management sector by supporting EMA course participants, providing an online information service, welcoming researchers and ensuring the library collection reflects client information requirements. Visit our web pages at www.ema.gov.au/library.

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Australian Tsunami Warning System

Following the Indian Ocean tsunami on 26 December 2004, the Australian Government agreed to fund the development of an Australian Tsunami Warning System (ATWS). Implementation of the ATWS is being managed jointly by EMA, the Bureau of Meteorology and Geoscience Australia. It will be one of the first Indian Ocean regional warning systems, and will join a network of planned national systems which collectively form the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System. It will also integrate with the existing Pacific Tsunami Warning System to facilitate warnings to the South-West Pacific Region.

EMA has responsibility within the ATWS program for the implementation of community awareness and preparedness, and education and training programs in partnership with Australian States, Territories, local governments and industry. These critical elements of the ATWS will be developed and implemented by EMA over the next four years. At the same time, Geoscience Australia (GA) and the Bureau of Meteorology will be enhancing Australia's seismic and sea-level monitoring capability.

EMA is in the final stages of establishing its implementation team, and has facilitated the creation of an Australian Emergency Management Committee Tsunami Working Group (ATWG). The ATWG met for the first time in Perth between 30 November and 2 December 2005, and will be the focal point for engagement between the Australian Government, State, Territory and local governments in the process of delivering ATWS-related community outcomes.

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Safer Communities Awards 2005

Each year Emergency Management Australia hosts the national Safer Communities Awards to recognise projects judged innovative and which demonstrate best practice in emergency management.

The 2005 Awards attracted 63 entries at State and Territory level with 32 category winners going on to the national finals. They were judged by a national panel and awards presented by the Attorney-General Hon Philip Ruddock MP, in Parliament House, Canberra on 2 December 2005.

A booklet describing all the award winners and commended entries can be found on the EMA website at www.ema.gov.au.

A new category for projects of national significance was created for the 2005 Awards. Geoscience Australia received this award with a combination of three entries. The projects were:

1. Collaborative 100K Mapping Pilot for Emergency Management, developed by GA in response to concerns of emergency managers on the lack of updated and suitable topographic information for use in emergency planning and response;
2. Cities Project Perth, a natural hazard risk assessment study by GA and collaborators across three levels of government; and
3. Scenario Modelling for the Assessment of National Catastrophic Disaster Capability, developed by GA to the benefit of many other emergency management related agencies across Australia.

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PLANNING & COORDINATION

In early 2005 Planning & Coordination (P&C) Group was formed to manage an increase in offshore emergency responses and highly specialised domestic events. The group design is deliberately flexible and interlinked to provide a strong framework to support a trained surge staffing capacity to manage the workload in the event of a large scale emergency.

The P&C Group responsibilities encompass management of international engagement activities including offshore capacity building projects, training and development, and contingency and emergency planning. The National Emergency Management Coordination Centre (NEMCC) monitors current and emerging risks, using a whole-of-government, multi-agency and all-hazards approach, engaging in information management and dissemination, with a 24 hour duty officer system and the ability to set up the operations centre on demand.

Under this new framework, P&C Group had a busy 2005. Following the Indian Ocean tsunami, an earthquake on Nias Island in Indonesia killed up to 2000 people, and an Australian Navy Sea Hawk helicopter crash claimed nine Navy personnel. In July P&C closely monitored the London terrorist bombing, and in August, the NEMCC was activated for a third time when peat fires in Sumatra ran out of control. The Australian contingent, led by an NEMCC staff member, had only just returned from Sumatra when the US and Caribbean were devastated by *Hurricane Katrina*,

followed by *Rita*. The Australian Government offered assistance to the US, and P&C provided support to the three-person team which went to the area, and made preparations for the possibility of sending a larger contingent. The NEMCC was activated for a fifth time in October for the Bali terrorist attack bombing—where 22 people lost their lives, four of whom were Australian. The P&C Group assisted in such tasks as repatriation of the deceased. In the same month, more than 73 000 people died when an earthquake hit Pakistan. All of these events had P&C either activated or on high alert, testing arrangements and protocols to the limit. To ensure these arrangements covered every contingency, two major training exercises were run through the year: *Exercise Mercury*, a multi-jurisdictional exercise on counter terrorism; and *Exercise Eleusis*, testing Avian Influenza preparedness.

While the operational side of P&C Group was running at high speed, the International Engagement arm had an equally busy and productive year, with offshore capacity building projects in full swing. The year's end saw a formalised Solomon Islands project, and a signed record of understanding for an Indonesian project targeting emergency services development.

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Addendum

In the August 2005 issue of the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* an article on page 15 by John Pisaniello and Jennifer McKay entitled *The need for private dam safety assurance policy – demonstrative case studies 10 years later* contained an omission. The paper in its review of how dam safety is managed in Australia is in fact referring accurately to mainland Australia only.

The authors and the Journal wish to thank both Max Giblin and Alistair Brooks from the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment in

Tasmania for bringing to their attention that Tasmania recently implemented policy on private dam safety which effectively deals with all the issues raised as barriers to achieving private dam safety programs in other states. The current policy being implemented in Tasmania under the *Water Management (Safety of Dams) Regulations 2003* encompasses all dams, large and small, private and public, low and greater hazard, and is based on the various guidelines published by the Australian National Committee on Large Dams.

The authors believe that the Tasmanian policy provides a model approach to private dam safety assurance that warrants further discussion. A follow-up paper will soon be published in this journal to be authored collaboratively by John Pisaniello, Jennifer McKay, Max Giblin and Alistair Brooks, which will present further empirical evidence of the extent of the problem on mainland Australia, and showcase the Tasmanian policy as a possible solution.