

Get started on your Community Disaster Plan

Congratulations, you've taken the first step in preparing your community for an emergency. In the Disaster Preparation Workshops, people kept asking for a simple method. However, there are any number of ways to develop your plan, from community workshops (see the *Running a Community Planning Workshop* resource) to following a template and hoping it covers everything your community needs.

The best outcomes will be achieved by workshopping ideas with the people who will enact the plan.

This Resource should be used to get ideas flowing. It is not exhaustive, nor does it cover every situation, but it's a good start.

1. What plans already exist for your area?

There's likely to be a Zone Emergency Management Plan, your council should have a Disaster Management Plan that covers its own operations (which often affect communities), and State and Commonwealth Governments have plans for major disasters – see list at the end of this document. Start by reading these and think about the sort of disasters they focus on and how they respond.

2. What features of your community need to be considered in an emergency plan?

- Is it an area that's prone to bushfires?
- Does the area have earthquake fault lines or volcanic activity?
- Are there rivers or creeks or lakes that could flood in a heavy rain event?
- Has there been a history of landslides?
- Are there sites with hazardous chemicals or materials?
- Are most homes built of solid materials like brick or stone and well maintained?
- Is there a choice of roads in and out of your community?
- Do you have a safe, central gathering place like a community hall?
- Are there sensitive defence, resources or terrorism targets nearby?
- Is your town on mains water?
- Do you get cyclones, tornadoes, gale-force winds?
- Is coastal erosion a factor?
- Is there a railway line and what sort of goods or people does it carry?
- Are you on a major road freight route?
- Do you experience long periods of very hot or cold weather?
- Is there a service station with all fuel types nearby (diesel, petrol, gas)?
- Do you have backup systems if the main power grid goes out?
- Are there emergency medical facilities nearby?
- Who is unlikely to hear about or know what to do in an emergency?

3. Using scenarios to generate ideas

One of pitfalls in doing a plan is that we tend to go down a rabbit hole of detail. The detail's important, but you don't want to start there. At the beginning of the planning process, let your imagination run free, use scenarios that get people thinking about situations your community may not have experienced in the past.

Community Disaster Preparation

Ideas to help you write a disaster plan

www.communitydisasterprep.com.au

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4. Take me to your leader

In any incident that involves the police or emergency services, one of these agencies will take overall coordination of the situation (in South Australia, SA Police has this role). Your council Mayor or CEO should provide updates about local government services in response to the emergency, but people will also turn to local leaders for information or advice.

How well prepared are your local leaders? Have you nominated a spokesperson so there's one source of reliable information? The police tell us there are four things you should do to prepare for and respond to an emergency:

- Plan and prepare
- Reduce your risk
- Listen to and act on the advice from authorities
- Get involved as a volunteer

During an emergency, it's essential that your spokesperson is passing on the right information, that "listening to and acting on advice from authorities" is done quickly and accurately. Your plan should set out your local chain of command:

Designated Community Coordinator and Spokesperson

Coordinates local response and communications with emergency services, council and the community:

Name:

Mobile Phone Number:

E-mail:

Backup Community Coordinator and Spokesperson

Local coordination and communications in the event the designated person cannot assume responsibility:

Name:

Mobile Phone Number:

E-mail:

Operations Manager

Makes sure community actions get done (organising people, shelter, supplies, transport, first aid):

Name:

Mobile Phone Number:

E-mail:

There are likely to be a number of people who have offered to help in the event of an emergency (and who aren't already committed to volunteering roles in emergency services), do you have their contact details printed out and handy? Do you know what skills or resources they can contribute – is this written down?

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5. A central gathering place

Where will people naturally gather in an emergency? A lot depends on the nature of the emergency, but it's likely to be the town centre or a shop or pub where people naturally gravitate. Is there shelter? Mobile phone reception? Internet coverage? Water? Safe separation between cars and pedestrians? Arrangements for pets and other animals?

6. Alternative communication channels

In a big emergency it's likely that the mobile phone and internet system will be overloaded, and landlines may not work. So how are you going to communicate? Do people use CB radios? Have you determined what channel you will use in an emergency? Can someone run messages between emergency services and your coordination spot?

- Are your committee or leaders' phone numbers printed out and handy?
- What about the nearest hospital or medical clinic? Fuel supplier? Shop/supermarket?
- If the internet is down or phone batteries are flat, do you have paper and pens?
- Have you set and communicated a time for a daily community briefing?

7. Visitor and travellers

In a major emergency there are likely to be a number of visitors or travellers who have no idea about your disaster plans, and possibly have never thought about what to do if they are stranded or have to take a different route.

You should also consider people travelling to, or through, your town. What if hundreds of people suddenly arrive, if there's no fuel and they're stuck there? What if they bring their animals: where can you put horses, dogs, cats, alpacas, the prize bull?

8. Isolated and vulnerable people

Think about:

- The elderly
- People with disabilities
- Children whose parents might be involved in emergency service responses
- Recent arrivals to the area
- People who have had an operation or illness
- Those without access to transport
- People who may not speak English or who find it difficult to understand emergency information

Who's looking out for them?

We can all be vulnerable in different circumstances. Just because someone is usually taking a strong leadership role doesn't mean they're able to do it in this situation.