

Building the Sustainability of Information flow to Communities During Emergency Events

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Abstract

The provision of clear, relevant, timely, accurate and consistent information to communities and other stakeholders during emergency events is vital for community safety.

In June 2006, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) undertook a review of information flow during fire emergency events in Victoria over the 2005/06 season. Subsequently, a number of initiatives are currently being implemented.

These initiatives include the development of the following:

- best practice guidelines, procedures, systems, tools and information dissemination methods to support the functioning of the Information Unit under the AIMS structure, in a coordinated and integrated manner between agencies;
- an accredited training framework that will address the various roles and responsibilities within an Information Unit for different level incidents within both agencies;
- a multi-agency pool of trained staff;
- continued improvement of external web services to meet community information needs, particularly during peak demand periods during incidents, and
- The integration of CFA and DSE Information Units located in each agency's State Emergency Co-ordination facility, to create one operating unit.

The initiatives described above also build on DSE's existing Natural Disaster Mitigation Program (NDMP) funded Community Partnerships project which has an emergency flow component.

In addition to the process outlined above, in 2007 the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the University of Tasmania through the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre initiated a joint project to identify, map, examine and improve the flow of information during fire related emergency events in order to develop a 'Prioritisation Framework' for the flow of critical information. This project is also supported by the NDMP.

The variety of information required and the diversity of stakeholders involved in the flow of information during a bushfire emergency is very complex. It is important to understand these complexities in order to improve information flow and identify and address existing and potential barriers.

Key words

Information flow

Information Unit

Bushfire emergency

Community safety

Community engagement