Request For Assistance Online – an Operations Management System implemented by the NSW State Emergency Service

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Abstract

After years of research and planning the NSW State Emergency Service (SES) commenced a project in 2005 to replace a labour intensive and manual paper based system for managing operations with a computerised information system, Request For Assistance (RFA) Online, an Operations Management System.

The system was built by the SES, for the SES to operate on minimal infrastructure and is capable of handling all emergency information received by the SES when responding to flood or storm emergencies or other activities.

It enables emergency management information to be collected, recorded and actioned when responding to requests for help during emergencies or other activities undertaken by the SES. The flexibility of the system enables information to be exchanged, manipulated and presented to volunteers and staff at all levels of the SES to assist in better decision making processes when responding to emergencies.

The functionality of RFA Online provides standardisation, situational awareness, visibility and reporting mechanisms enabling volunteers and staff to record the support they provide to their communities including responses to flood and storm emergencies and assisting other agencies undertake task such as land search, road crash rescue through to public education activities and training.

At the commencement of the project in February 2005, the SES undertook extensive consultation with volunteers and staff at all levels by running workshops over a two month period in rural, regional and metropolitan areas and kept them informed through newsletters, a project website and stakeholder meetings.
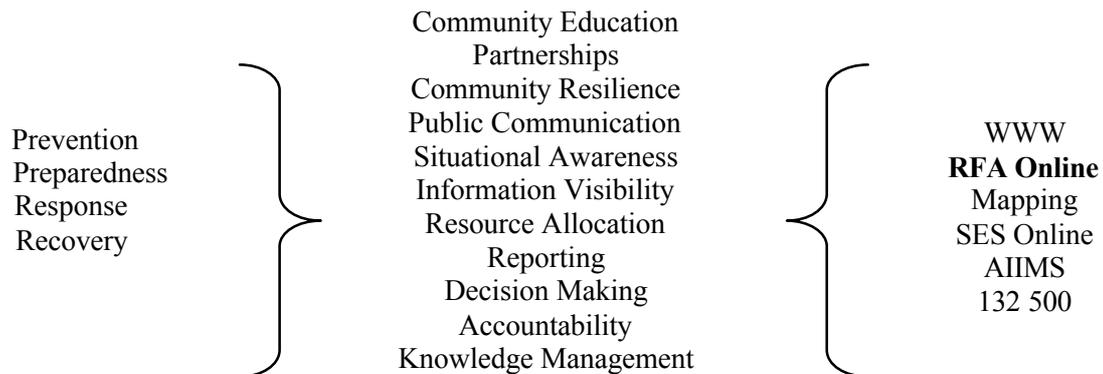
RFA Online went live on 4 October 2005, delivered on time, on budget and above specification and has been patented in Australia and overseas.

This presentation will provide an overview on functionality, innovation and experiences of the SES in developing and implementing an Operations Management System including.

The following extended abstract covers the key points of the oral presentation that will overview the RFA Online project and the functionality of the system.

NSW SES Information Systems in the PPRR Framework

NSW SES considers all its Information Systems across the PPRR Framework to support better managed emergencies:

Prevention
Preparedness
Response
Recovery

Community Education
Partnerships
Community Resilience
Public Communication
Situational Awareness
Information Visibility
Resource Allocation
Reporting
Decision Making
Accountability
Knowledge Management

WWW
RFA Online
Mapping
SES Online
AIIMS
132 500

Project Aim

The RFA Online project aimed to:
- Standardise operations management;
- Progress from manual to electronic systems; and
- Provide:
  o Situational Awareness;
  o Visibility;
  o Reporting.

RFA Online - History

From 2000 to commencement of the project in 2005, NSW SES undertook extensive work to identify the optimal solution for their Operations Management System – RFA Online.

The Project - Consultation and Communication

A keynote success of the project was the Consultation and Communications strategy including workshops in rural, regional and metropolitan areas to gather requirements from volunteers and staff.

Ongoing communication with stakeholders was provided through regular updates and a project website.

RFA Online - Innovation

RFA Online is innovative – it is a Windows Smart Client designed to operate on minimal infrastructure over low bandwidth connections. It is:
- Integrated with other NSW SES Systems;
- Interoperable;
- Scalable;
- Redundant;
- Secure;
- Usable;
- Built to Standards; and
- Easy to maintain.

Functionality

An overview of the Operations Management and Computer Aided Dispatch like functions of RFA Online will be discussed including:

- Call taking – Requests For Assistance from the public, agencies and internally;
- Duplicate Checking;
- Job Registration;
- Team Management;
- Tasking and Prioritisation;
- Job Completion;
- Sector and Event Management;
- Operations Log;
- Out of Area Assistance;
- Situation and Activity Reporting;
- Briefings;
- Management Console; and
- Mapping.

Future

Lessons learned from the second largest NSW SES Operational Response in the June 2007 Central Coast and Hunter Floods and Storms will see RFA Online further evolve to improve Operations Management in the NSW SES.