EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES

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Emergency Management Context

It can be said that emergency management activities such as emergency planning greatly contribute towards community safety and sustainability.

In some states and territories there is legislation that requires communities to commit to the emergency management process. Over the past few years there have been a number of initiatives both at the State and Federal levels to assist communities with this important function of community safety. The Australian Emergency Manual-Community Planning Guide produced in 1991 is one such initiative. The introduction of a risk management approach to emergency management is another example.

The four key components that need to be considered are described as follows:

- **Prevention** - regulatory and physical measures to ensure that emergencies are prevented or their effects mitigated.
- **Preparedness** - arrangements to ensure that, all resources and services, which may be needed, can be rapidly mobilized and deployed.
- **Response** - actions taken during and immediately after hazard impact to ensure that its effects are minimized.
- **Recovery** - arrangements to ensure that a community is restored to normal”.

Planning for Communities.

Emergency Management Planning is a treatment strategy within the Emergency Risk Management Process. It is best described as an enabling process for communities to cope with residual risk.

The question often asked is Why Plan? This needs to be answered in a way that will emphasize the social and economic factors as well as legislative obligations such as State and Territory specific requirements, Duty of Care and various Occupational Health and Safety Acts.

For example The Community Planning Guide answers as follows:

"The economic and social effects of emergencies including destruction of property, dislocation of communities and the loss of life are increasing in scope and severity.

Coping with hazards gives us our reason and focus for planning. If hazards natural or technological do not exist, or threaten, there would be no reason to plan. Hazards exist in all communities whether they are recognized or not.”

Emergency Planning is a sequence of steps with one result being the production of a written emergency plan. The written plan is a record of the agreed arrangements made during the planning process. They include an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the organizations involved not only in the response to emergencies but also in preparedness and recovery activities. To be effective the emergency management planning process must be proactive, involve all stakeholders including community representatives and develop public awareness and education programs.

It is now widely recognized by emergency managers in Australia that communities who are prepared and have an understanding of the risks they face can better cope with emergencies than those communities that are not.

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Special Considerations when working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities.

Australia has for many years depended on immigration for its development as well as socio-economic growth. Working effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the area of emergency management has become not only challenging over the years for emergency managers but also one of significant importance. The need has been widely recognized for emergency management organizations to develop polices and strategies for such communities. The Emergency Risk Management Process has shown that these communities can be vulnerable during times of emergencies. “Many variables may contribute to this vulnerability, for example: people may not be as resilient if an emergency occurs if their English is not proficient and they cannot access information; or, they may be more susceptible to particular hazards or risks as new arrivals to Australia in an unfamiliar environment.”

How then do we as emergency management professionals ensure that emergency management arrangements are tailored to fit the needs of the entire community we represent?

Emergency management professionals are sometimes criticised for what the community regards as a lack of communication prior to, during and after impact of emergencies. Not only then is the need for effective communication channels important but also there are a number of other critical factors in dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, which must be considered.

So what then are the critical areas emergency managers need to consider when working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities? They are many that may have different priorities from community to community depending on a number of factors such as arrival time in Australia and language issues.

They can be described as follows:
“In considering emergency management issues for NESB residents and visitors, the following points appear pertinent:
The person who finds themself in an emergency situation would want to know the following:
What is happening?
What should I do?
Who can I trust?
Is it safe to….?

The importance of communication at their level of English proficiency is critical.
The nature of an emergency instantly creates issues of time, immediacy and reaction

The importance of planning and developing partnerships with ethnic community organizations, as part of everyday business.

Respect for cultural differences on the part of the emergency management team and emergency service provider.

The importance of prior knowledge through training and resources, e.g. checklists.

Community interest in emergency issues varies according to the immediacy of the need.

The importance of recognizing that information is prioritized according to perceived need and is most effective if provided at the appropriate level and appropriate time.

How do we engage ethnic communities in risk management?

The importance of a strategic approach in identifying areas of ethnic community interest and ownership in emergency management.

Workshop

A three-day workshop titled Emergency Management for Australia's Non English Speaking Background (NESB) Community: Residents and Visitors was conducted from 18 to 21 March 2001 at the Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI), Mount Macedon, Victoria. This was part of a National Studies Program sponsored by Emergency Management Australia (EMA) in partnership with the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau and Kangan Batman TAFE. The aim of the workshop was to develop draft national guidelines for working and communicating effective emergency management arrangements with people from Non-English Speaking Background including overseas visitors. The delegates from States and Territories represented a number of service providers.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Identify appropriate and effective strategies and tactics for emergency management for NESB people in the local community.
2. Produce a draft set of guidelines.
3. Put forward recommendations to the Director, AEMI, EMA, Mt Macedon, regarding the outcomes of this workshop.

The term Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities was preferred to Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) communities by the workshop participants because in the context of emergency management, the issues concerning cultural diversity are equally important as the issues around language and communication.

As part of this program a research paper titled Emergency Management for Australia's Non English Speaking Background Community: Residents and Visitors was prepared by Jenny Ashby and Associates Pty Ltd. The focus of this paper was to state the current situation in relation to emergency management and these communities. It highlighted the fact that Australia is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world with 4.17 million visitors each year. The paper also endeavored to offer some answers to the following:

“How culturally diverse is Australia?

What guidelines for working with cultural diversity already exist at National, State and local levels? This includes discussion on specific tools to assist implementation of these guidelines.

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What relevance does emergency management have for NESB communities? This includes three case studies of best practice models involving Police (Northern Territory), Fire and Emergency Services (Victoria) and a water utility, Sydney Water (NSW)

What lessons have emerged for emergency management from previous work with ethnic communities?

What are the critical factors you need to consider when working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Australia?5

With this challenge in mind the workshop provided the opportunity to not only discuss these issues, but also to share the wealth and experiences of the various delegates. The principal outcomes of the workshop were:

"a list of suggested initiatives that will aid the management of the culturally and linguistically diverse community issues in an emergency management context; and,

a proposal for the writing of national guidelines for emergency managers working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and commitment from a core group of workshop participants to work on this project."6

Recommendations that will further enhance partnerships with the aim of working more effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse communities were:

That EMA and the States/Territories continue to support the development of National Guidelines for emergency managers working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Some of the recommendations from the workshop that will be included in the guidelines as recommended practice for those involved in emergency management include:

1. That emergency management organizations (and those working in emergency management, including local government) encourage direct involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in emergency management planning and management issues; That evaluation processes specifically considering culturally and linguistically diverse communities should be incorporated in all emergency management planning and operational outcomes.

2. That EMA and the States/Territories adopt the principles and practices as outlined in the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society (DIMA 1998).

3. That EMA and the States/Territories work together to develop a framework for the recruitment and retention of emergency managers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

4. That organizations with an interest in this area should consider working together to support Emergency Management for culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia with the following initiatives:

Consider including cultural awareness as a selection criteria for all EMA and State/Territory projects and review EMA’s and State/Territory policies in this area applying to all other activities.

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Development of Community Training Modules, which could be, used by emergency services organizations in training and speaking to community groups about emergency management issues. This could take a number of modes, including the production of awareness raising educational/training video. Participants and other interested parties might consider applying for a Project Grant through EMA, or other means, to seek funding to implement this strategy.

Include cultural awareness sessions where possible in ALL Commonwealth (AEMI) and State/Territory training activities, including the Senior Executives’ Briefing, and develop these into competency based training modules;

Support the delivery of these sessions with cultural awareness training for Commonwealth (AEMI) and State/Territory education officers;

Appoint a qualified person on a part-time basis at AEMI, to assist the education staff with Cultural Awareness activities;

Include research issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse communities as part of the national research agenda in emergency management.”

Guidelines

A writing team consisting of the following was formed to produce the Draft National Guidelines.

- Barry Dean, Senior Education Officer, AEMI, EMA Mt Macedon
- Hass Dellal, Executive Director, Australian Multicultural Foundation
- Andrew Hamilton, Manager of Workplace Risk Management and Environment, Kangan Batman TAFE
- Ivan Kolarik, Executive Director, National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau
- Roberta Liddell, Australian Red Cross, ACT
- Louise Mitchell, Senior Education Officer, AEMI, EMA, Mt Macedon
- Superintendent Rodney Norman, Victoria Police, Statewide Strategic Support Division
- Superintendent Mick Van Heythuysen, member of the Council for Multicultural Australia, Crime Prevention and Aboriginal and Ethnic Services, Northern Territory Police

The National Guidelines will provide emergency planners with a range of tools to assist with meeting the emergency management needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. However, it is also recognized that the involvement of the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community is one of the main contributing success factors.

The Draft National Guidelines reflect current accepted principles concerning culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. They are the New Agenda for Multicultural Australia and the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society.

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The four principles from the New Agenda for Multicultural Australia are:

1. **Civic Duty**, which obliges all Australians to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish;

2. **Cultural Respect**, which, subject to the law, gives all Australians the right to express their own culture and beliefs and obliges them to accept the right of others to do the same;

3. **Social Equity**, which entitles all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity so that they are able to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination, including race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth; and

4. **Productive Diversity**, which maximizes for all Australians the significant cultural, social and economic dividends arising from the diversity of our population.

The seven principles from the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society are:

**Access**
Government services should be available to everyone who is entitled to them and should be free of any form of discrimination irrespective of a person’s country of birth, language, culture, race or religion.

**Equity**
Government services should be developed and delivered on the basis of fair treatment of clients who are eligible to receive them.

**Communication**
Government service providers should use strategies to inform eligible clients of services and their entitlements and how they can obtain them. Providers should also consult with their clients regularly about the adequacy, design and standard of government services.

**Responsiveness**
Government services should be sensitive to the needs and requirements of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and responsive as far as practicable to the particular circumstances of individuals.

**Effectiveness**
Government service providers should be “results oriented”, focussed on meeting the needs of clients from all backgrounds.

**Efficiency**
Government service providers should optimize the use of available public resources through a user-responsive approach to service delivery, which meets the needs of clients.

**Accountability**
Government service providers should have a reporting mechanism in place which ensures they are accountable for implementing Charter objectives for clients (for example, by reporting on this in annual reports or other types of report).
Conclusion

As part of the International Decade for Disaster Reduction the Disaster Preparedness Resources Centre at the University of British Columbia have within the Canadian framework produced Guidelines on Cultural Diversity and Disaster Management. These guidelines primarily deal with disaster response and recovery.

The Australian Draft Guidelines are structured on inclusiveness in all areas of emergency management not just the response and recovery phases.

The various strategies for inclusiveness identified are:

Identification of Communities.
Connecting with Communities.
Communicating with Communities.
Responding to the Communities’ needs.
Education and Training.
Monitoring and Evaluation.

The underlying philosophy for emergency management of CALD communities is inclusiveness. This means that the service is for and about all Australians and overseas visitors.\(^10\)

\(^{10}\) EMA (2001) Emergency Management for Australia's Non English Speaking Background Community: Residents and Visitors Workshop Report